THE WELL OF ENGLISH AND THE BUCKET

BURGES JOHNSON

THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/wellofenglishbuc00john

THE WELL OF ENGLISH, AND THE BUCKET

THE WELL OF ENGLISH, AND THE BUCKET

BY

BURGES JOHNSON

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND DIRECTOR
OF THE BUREAU OF PUBLICATION
VASSAR COLLEGE

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1917

Copyright, 1917,
By Little, Brown, and Company.

All rights reserved

Published, October, 1917

Norwood Press
Set up and electrotyped by J. S. Cushing Co., Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.
Presswork by S. J. Parkhill & Co., Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

PE
1408
J63w

TO

"ENGLISH B"

FELLOW EDITORS OF RECURRENT JUMBLES OF ENTERTAINING MSS.; FELLOW CRITICS WHO HAVE REQUIRED MORE REWRITING OF ME THAN I OF THEM; FELLOW WRITERS WHO, I HOPE, MAY DISCOVER SEVERAL PLEASANT CLASSROOM REMINISCENCES BETWEEN THE LINES OF THESE COLLECTED ESSAYS

A FOREWORD

RECENT years have produced a steadily increasing number of published guides to short story writing, lessons in journalism, aids to advertisement writers, and the like. Their appearance proves a widening interest in vocational training for the profession of letters. To one who holds that pure literature has thriven best as an avocation, and that the extended development of writing as a business has somewhat lowered its standards, many of these textbooks make small appeal. To be sure, journalism, in so far as the term refers to the business of making a newspaper, has now its professional schools, where classroom study of theory supplements laboratory practice; and results have justified their establishment and the compiling of many textbooks suited to their needs.

But skill in the use of practical written English, while it is so large a part of a journalistic equipment, belongs exclusively to no vocation or group of vocations. There is only one standard of good English. The fact that the terms "newspaper English" and "college English" have in the past meant definitely different things seems to be an aspersion upon the college as well as upon the newspaper. If the appearance of textbooks on certain standardized, commercialized forms of expression will tend to continue the distinction between idealized and practicalized English, their publication is to be deplored. Let us hope it will be a force in the other direction, and that our schools and colleges are recognizing that they must teach an English which should be the best as well as the most effective medium of communication in the every-day social and commercial life of the communities around them.

These collected essays are addressed to anyone interested in the art of written expression, who enjoys a discussion of subjects connected

with the study of that art. The opening essay was published before the writer had any teaching experience; nor had he then enjoyed the acquaintance of colleagues who have for many years placed as much importance as he does upon laboratory work in English courses, and who might properly be inclined to quote at him, in their kindly fashion, "Thou sayest an undisputed thing in such a solemn way!" Yet because it expressed sincere conviction on the part of one who then dealt editorially with college products, and because he still believes it to be justified by the attitude of many colleges, he is so bold as to let it stand.

Thanks are due to the publishers of *Harper's Magazine* and *The Century* for permission to use several of the essays incorporated into this book.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	A Foreword	vii
I	The Well of English and the Bucket	1
II	Grammar, the Bane of Boyhood	29
III	Impression and Expression	53
IV	Essaying an Essay	83
V	The Right Not to Laugh	98
VI	The Every-Day Profanity of Our Best People	115
VII	Ethics of the Pen	129

THE WELL OF ENGLISH, AND THE BUCKET

I

THE WELL OF ENGLISH AND THE BUCKET

Prior to the Civil War and for some time after, while this nation was building, brawn and "horse sense" were at a premium, and the refinements of education at a discount. So, for generations, our national ideas were popularly measured by their practical results, and our ideals by their expediency. But when the continent-wide structure was fully reared, and there came a time for the polishing process to begin, we seized upon higher education as an instrument ready to hand. Until that time it had been a class affair, confined to the few, and used as a training for the "unpractical" profession. The many ignored or tolerated,

or even in some cases venerated it, but seldom criticized; why should they? But as the popular mind came gradually to recognize the possible utility of this higher education, it began to scrutinize through unfamiliar eyes the means for attaining it, testing those means in the light of expediency and practical results. Widespread criticism resulted, much of it hasty, unsympathetic, and ill-advised.

Those who directed the affairs of our colleges met this sudden attack in various fashions. Some hastened more than halfway to meet what they thought must be a settled public opinion. Others stubbornly closed their ears to popular criticism, refusing even to consider and classify it, and shuddering at the very word "vocational"; still others, and let us believe a goodly number, listened discriminatingly, studying how to attain to the highest degree of usefulness; and in general it was their confident belief that this higher education might be made to serve the life of to-day without any betrayal of pure learning or any cheapening of culture.

To me it would seem that in one field of college activity all of these various groups might meet and work in harmony. The study of English expression might be so conducted as to serve the practical needs of the life of to-day without any betrayal of pure learning. And yet, strangely enough, in this very field the old cultural college and the new vocational university alike are weakest. This is particularly strange because the vulnerable point is such an obvious one. Achilles kicks up his heel in the very face of the enemy! College students as a general thing have not been taught to write well, and the fact flaunts itself abroad, earning for the college, even among thinking people, a discredit that it does not wholly deserve.

Business men of the outside world are constantly having called to their attention the weaknesses in the practical English work of college-trained young men and young women. The college throws the burden for this weakness back upon the high school, and any teacher of English in any of our American colleges will be

able to present an amusing array of exhibits to prove that great numbers of high-school graduates enter the college unable to express themselves clearly or even intelligently in writing. Such an exhibit was compiled and published by a Harvard instructor some time ago from the papers that came to his attention in the course of his routine work, and the exhibit was least surprising to those who were most familiar with undergraduate material.

But it is not sufficient for the colleges to throw blame back upon the high schools. That involves another question that should be answered in its own time and place. Surely no excuse justifies the fact that colleges are conferring their degrees upon young men and young women inadequately trained in the use of English.

It seems to be the case that on comparatively few of the faculties of our universities and colleges is there any one whose time is devoted to the business of teaching students to write letters, to spell correctly, to express themselves simply and directly in the various ways that

will be expected of them when they enter upon the activities of outside life. A certain professor of English answers that such work should be done by the high school. He will admit that seventy-five per cent. of the examination-papers in his own course show lamentable abilities in these directions, but it is not for him to spend a large proportion of his time in undertaking work that should have been done long before. His duties relate to the development of good taste in the selection of literature, or analytical consideration of classic examples, or the development of kindred matters along cultural lines. If his work calls for the preparation of essays or "themes", or other literary output on the part of his students, he soon comes to feel that a certain percentage of the class never can write and never will, that their abilities lie along other lines and that he must handle them according to his best judgment, either passing them on to get rid of them or forcing them into other classroom activities; so far as he is concerned they are the "submerged tenth", as another professor has

dubbed them, a hopeless fraction of the class, dulling the edge of the professor's own enthusiasm and gaining nothing for themselves.

These students go out from college, along with their more capable fellows who have shown aptitude in appreciation and criticism of literature, quite unable to write a good business letter or to present in a clear and effective way in writing any statement that from time to time they may be called upon to set forth.

What are colleges doing to train students to meet everyday tests in their English composition work after they are graduated? This question was put to an eminent professor in one of the largest eastern universities. He replied: "What you suggest is vocational training for literature. . . . Now, this is something new; it is not yet given anywhere. In fact, it is only within the last decade that we have given vocational training for journalism. Here at —— we have never considered the advisability of vocational training for literary workers. Indeed, we are a little

inclined to fight shy of any kind of vocational training."

Chesterton, in one of his essays, says that it is a tendency of these lazy times to let others do our thinking for us. We let some one else coin a phrase, and we get aboard that phrase as though it were a train of cars and ride on it to its destination. To those who have always believed that the attainment of a general culture should be the aim of an undergraduate four years, the phrase "vocational training" has come to have an alarming ring to it; it seems to stand for all those popular influences that menace the cultural ideal. So that in the phrasing of his reply our eminent teacher of English dealt a benumbing blow.

But, after all, why be alarmed by a phrase? If the business of writing so well that the result will stand the commercial test is a vocation, it is one in which every student after graduation should engage at one time or another. Public spirit may call upon him to write a clear and concise letter to some newspaper; his own business may require him to set forth in a brief

the peculiar qualities of his particular stock in trade; his professional associates may call upon him for a paper, and his progress may be largely influenced by his ability to meet this demand; and in any case he must write effective letters. The training to meet this particular commercial test must surely be an essential part of a broad, general culture; for it is safe to say that the college which does not supply such training is sending out graduates unfitted for life in general.

Leaders in many sorts of life's activities have drawn up this indictment against the colleges, and surely it is giving the colleges every advantage if we seek testimony in particular from publishers and editors, for toward them are turning selected college graduates who feel that they have an inclination toward literary activity. A few years ago the head of one of our large publishing houses, himself a man of broad culture and scholarly achievement, said, "I do not want a graduate of —— University in my employ because I find it hard to make a master carpenter out of a man who

has not learned the use of the plane." And yet that university was making a special claim to effectiveness in its English courses.

But there is no need to single out any particular institution for attack. One need only examine the correspondence of any business house which deals in some way with college students. For instance, many publishing houses offering subscription sets of books endeavor to secure student agents to work among fellow-students, or to secure young graduate students who will return to the localities where they are acquainted. The bulk of correspondence with candidates for such work is all the support to these assertions that is necessary.

Go a little further than this, and consult with the men who conduct graduate schools. Surely students who have planned to go from college into the study of law or medicine or theology or journalism are men who already must have felt some inclination to gain ability in writing that will stand the test of everyday use. Nevertheless, just as the

college complains of the high school, so does the graduate school complain of the college. It needs only that life should complain of the graduate school, and the blame-shifting procession is complete, so far as mortal knowledge goes. Behold, a morning paper fills in this gap; for the news is prominently displayed that a committee of the New York State Bar Association in a certain report places on two classes of lawyers — the incompetent ones and the tricksters — the responsibility for failure to prevent much of the litigation which now clutters court calendars. The incompetents form by far the larger class, the report states, and it is largely because they cannot write "clear and unmistakable English" that a great mass of legal actions come about.

Assuming for the moment the failure of the secondary school to perform this one of its functions, how is a compensating training in the college to be effectively provided? In the first place, the college must admit the need and be prepared to say: "Either we will make a more exacting demand upon the secondary

school, or we ourselves will supply this training to our students even though we must devote time to spelling and composition and letter forms and language work that the high school and grade school have failed to provide. We must do it even at the sacrifice of the time and dignity of those who conduct the English work upon our college faculties." To such doctors of literature as feel that they could not properly lower their estate to that of doctors of spelling and composition and letter forms, this work certainly does not belong. Their work is distinct and of course essential. And surely no one can effectively teach that which he feels it beneath him to teach.

But this doctoring of written English is preliminary to all advanced English work, and the fact is that college faculties as a general thing do not include enough teachers ready and fitted to train students in the vocational work of composition. Undoubtedly, and often as the result of accident, some do. But the method of faculty selection lessens the likelihood of such an occurrence. Perhaps the

day is going by when it can be said that the preparation of a thesis upon some fragment of the literature of another period is a prerequisite for such selection. Let us add hastily that we would not be unjust to a scholastic honor representing not merely a thesis, but several years of intensive work under careful guidance amid scholarly surroundings. Yet if such a degree stands for nothing that could equip a man to teach the essentials of clearly written everyday English, and if in addition it does not even represent the possession of that intangible essential, an ability to transfer ideas to the mind of another, and if it does not stand for sympathy or morality or manhood, which of course it does not, then what in the name of Tom Taylor is its justification as a prerequisite for teaching English composition?

Let us agree for the moment that this particular form of vocational training should find place in all of the colleges. Who, then, is to teach it? We quote the words of the director of a famous graduate school, who testifies to the woeful lack of this training in

the colleges that supply him with students. "Writing," he says, "is the only art that is taught by men who cannot practise it. You would not think of sending your son or daughter to study the violin under a teacher who could not play, or to study singing under a teacher who had never been able to sing, or sculpture under some one who had never modeled. And yet such effort as there is to teach the art of composition is largely in the hands of men who have had no practical experience in the art."

This of course does not mean that in the speaker's opinion there is no place for the man who should teach theory and criticism, and thereby develop understanding and appreciation. The finest critic need not be a composer. An English faculty made up wholly of teachers chosen because of their practical achievement in the field of composition would be a one-sided faculty and much weaker in one way than it is now in another. Work in practice and in theory must go hand in hand, and surely they could best be taught by masters

of practice and masters of theory working in conjunction.

In some colleges to-day the need of more practical English work has been ostentatiously recognized, and courses are offered under titles that suggest at once the most definite vocational training. "Short-story writing" and titles of similar import may be found written in a few of the catalogues. The existence of such courses is evidence of a real belief that some such practical demand must be met, but there have been drawn into the work men selected with other activities in view. An interesting by-product of result from this fact is the output of textbooks written by theorists upon various forms of the art of practical writing. It is safe to say that there is no technical bibliography so inadequate as a whole, no group of books on the subject of any art so widely ignored or condemned by the successful practitioners of that art, as this group of books. The only comforting thought in connection with them is that it never would have occurred to their authors to write them had not the

exigencies of the college situation forced them into a field where they did not belong. They have found the students greedy for such courses; they have found no textbooks ready to hand; and, human nature being as it is, who can blame them?

There is no quarrel here with the motives and methods, in general, of our cultural colleges, or, indeed, with their attitude toward vocational training as a whole. There is only an expressed belief that one most essential study — the practical use of good present-day English — is being inadequately taught. The selection of teachers is only one cause of the trouble; a greater difficulty lies in the attitude of the college itself toward work in English composition.

"I have two quarrels with college English," says the director of a large and successful institution that trains boys in mechanics. "One is the English style which my own classical training in college left with me. It is hampered by the effect of classic standards, and I use too many whereas's and nevertheless's and in-

asmuch's. I did not learn vigorous colloquial English to use for present-day needs. My second complaint is that I cannot get from the colleges a young man to teach my boys English. The college-trained teachers that I have secured are unsatisfactory because they insist upon following certain conventional methods in building an English department in a secondary school, and those methods do not lead to the acquisition of good English to meet the demands of present-day life. I am trying the experiment of drawing a teacher from the business field rather than from the academic field. I hope I have found a young man with the instinct for teaching, who knows from his business experience the needs of the life of to-day. I am watching to see whether he can do for me what the man of purely academic training cannot."

To such testimony as that from a teacher might be added the personal recollections of many students not far enough away from the influence of college life to have injured the value of their assertions. "The most definite encouragement I ever received in college," says

one of them, "to gain any ability in practical writing came not from any member of the faculty, but from the literary activities of the students themselves, and those literary activities, instead of being encouraged by the English teachers of my day, were frowned upon and curbed."

Of course he refers to work in connection with undergraduate publications — the literary magazine, the student newspaper, and the like. This opens up a field for discussion by no means new, and presents a problem that is faced earnestly by every thoughtful English instructor in any college. We are told that the experiment has been tried of utilizing these student undertakings to give strength to college English work, and that the result was satisfactory neither to the activities inside the classroom nor to those outside. In a recent article on student activities by a college president who is facing earnestly many new problems, the following paragraph is of interest in this connection.

"But now I shall be asked, 'Would you

substitute these activities for the studies, give up the classroom for the lounging-room and the union?' Of course not. The very excellence of these activities is that fundamentally they are the fruits of the classroom. But the point is that by these fruits the work of the classroom shall be known. We need not forget that these activities are only accidental and that the real value lies in the studies and the teaching. But none the less, it is true that these activities reveal to us far better than any examinations can do the success or failure of the classroom itself. They are, as it were, mirrors in which we can see ourselves and our work. If we want to know the effect of what we are doing in the classroom, let us look to see what the students are doing outside of it, when they are free to follow their own desires. If they do not on their own initiative carry on activities springing out of their studies, then you may count on it, however well the tests are met, that the studies are of little value."

Here, then, an authoritative representative of the colleges suggests a test of the efficiency

of work in English composition. If the college literary magazine is the result of a widespread effort on the part of the students to produce a creditable exhibit, then the practical English work in the classroom is effective. But bear in mind that it is not the quality of a student publication that is the test, for that quality will depend upon the accidental talent of half a dozen students in the college at any given time. The test must lie in some equation that represents enthusiastic support of the periodical by the bulk of the student body, the percentage of the total number of students who offer contributions to its pages, plus the general average of merit. Is it an exaggeration to assert that in any of our colleges of, say, five hundred students, the literary magazine publishes contributions from no more than fifty different students during the entire course of the year? If we said twenty-five we might be nearer right, and yet presumably the business for which these five hundred students have come together is directly in line with such individual endeavor as the

sending of contributions to their own publication.

Three generations ago Amherst College took the initiative in requiring physical exercise as a part of a well-balanced college course, and built upon its campus the first college gymnasium. Out of that wholesome beginning grew the whole problem of college athletics, and the same college that had first recognized the need for attention to athletics was prompt to recognize afterward the dangers attached to their growth. Those in authority determined that there was something wrong in a system that demanded of a student body financial support and provided the services of an expert teacher more highly paid than any recognized member of the faculty, and then applied those funds and that teaching skill to the super-development of a small selected squad of students. Without upsetting any beloved traditions, therefore, and without any great stir, they built up a new system which should provide skilled training in all of the recognized athletic sports to every member of the student body; they

provided athletic fields enough to make this possible, and a system that would bring in all of the essential elements of rivalry and competition; and then they required of every student that he should take some part in one or another of these activities, and even made the mastery of the art of swimming essential to graduation.

Every one applauds the development of this policy. It has been, or is being worked out in many other colleges, and the day will come when it will be as generally accepted as is the necessity for a gymnasium upon the campus.

And yet with this parallel before their eyes, the faculties of these colleges view with complacency or indifference the fact that a dozen or so students are being super-trained in their efforts to maintain certain college publications up to an accepted standard. The student body is being urged for the sake of college loyalty to maintain financially these institutions, conducted solely for the benefit of a small group. The result is that neither the college

nor the small group does benefit, because the burden upon the very few becomes very great. It is incumbent upon these student editors to maintain the standards that they deem worthy of the fame of their college, and lacking adequate support, they must do so much work themselves that they have too little time for the classroom.

It seems reasonable to believe that if the same intelligence might be applied to the solution of this problem that was applied to the solution of its parallel in athletics, a result might be gained that would help to solve two or three different questions which are now puzzling the minds of conscientious college presidents.

Some little part of the remedy, then, in our opinion, lies in the proper answer to this question: how may we utilize undergraduate publications in training students in practical English work? But a far more important step toward the remedy lies in a readjustment of the balance in the entire department of English. Our students are placing too much emphasis

upon the literatures of another day, and too little upon the best standards of present-day practice. It seems to be a very natural evolution which has brought about the present college methods of teaching English. When higher education began, there was only one exact science, mathematics, and the only languages with a body of literature to serve as the basis for study were dead languages. The planning of the curriculum was a simple matter for those pioneer faculties. To-day when several other exact sciences have come into existence, two or three of them far more intimate in their human relationship, mathematics still holds the center of the stage; and as for language, while Latin and Greek have retreated a little in the face of severe attacks, the only methods by which they could be taught have determined the methods of teaching English. Their best standards were dead standards, and so we are accustomed to value dead standards of English style beyond their deserts. Their grammatical constructions were fixed and immutable; so we learned to appreciate the

beauties of a dead form by studying its bones. This terrible tradition has its dead hand upon the English work even in our schools, and little children learn syntax and parse a verb, and so are able to analyze the perfection of *Thanatopsis!*

In a recent educational journal there is an article by a high-school teacher who paints this vivid picture of certain high-school work in English:

"The pupil first, — the one who has repeatedly been called hopeless! He has supposedly been taught penmanship, spelling, and grammar in the elementary schools; he has written compositions of some sort since he was in the primary grades; he has had various sorts of language work. In the secondary schools he has studied rhetoric, sentence-structure, and has written compositions which have been duly corrected. His errors have been pointed out to him. At the end of the first, second, third, or even in his graduating year, he is unable to write a sentence. I do not mean a good sentence or even a grammatical sentence, but I

mean that he will write as complete sentences, in his compositions, phrases such as 'of beautiful trees'; clauses such as 'although he came'; and still more frequently will he put several unconnected sentences, simple or otherwise, into one mess; or have his whole composition an incoherent string of words beginning with a capital letter, — and ending with a period, if he does not forget it. I think the schools are few, indeed, where such pupils do not exist in considerable numbers, and that the kind of pupil who does this sort of writing is unmistakable to any earnest teacher of English."

It is true that the pupils described by this writer are of the "submerged tenth", and are assigned to him as a special teacher; yet he later testifies to the fact that they all can be saved by special attention and taught to wield the English language. Your child or mine might be among them, normal mentally, but hopelessly confused by the terminology of a science unrelated to life, and brought to feel that what he writes for his teacher and what he says freely for himself are in different tongues.

This is at the root of the whole matter. No red-blooded child in grammar school ever enjoyed grammar, and yet that was the collective term to cover his study of English speech; and he ran forth from the classroom to chatter his own language in the streets, unaffected by the dry bones of syntax, which had rattled in his ears only a minute before. High school did little more for him, and he found himself in college unable to speak and write with simple and lucid directness, and with no one there among his instructors who had the time to labor over such elementary details.

A great responsibility rests upon the colleges. If there is something lacking in the elementary training of students, then the college must immediately secure teachers of proved efficiency in teaching more elementary things. Moreover, if you will agree that an art can best be taught by those who can themselves practise it, other requirements of a good teacher being equal, then have that in mind in selecting instructors. With the practical literary adviser upon a post-graduate faculty, it is

possible that the thesis might be forced to stand for something even more than an evidence of specific research; it might be forced to represent ability in the practical application of a knowledge of English style, and then there would be greater reason for making the degree which rests upon that thesis a prerequisite for a professorship in the art of English expression.

"A greater part of the thousands of manuscripts submitted to us annually," says the editor of a leading review, "are by college professors, and thirty per cent. of these cannot even be considered because they are so badly written." Surely this fact in itself indicates one point at which the strengthening process might begin.

"What you suggest is vocational training for literature," I am told. In this English-speaking land of ours, where a great annual inflow of foreign speech is constantly dashing its waves against the bulwarks of our language, what should our colleges be if not technical schools for the business of using English? Granted

that the cultural college does not aim to turn out a student equipped for architecture or engineering or the ministry or the law, yet it should turn out artisans, if not artists, in English, competent to handle the most essential tool in the world's workshop — their own language. This it does not at present do.

II

GRAMMAR, THE BANE OF BOYHOOD

Once upon a time there was a little boy, as the story-books say. He was servant to a harsh taskmaster who did him harm. It was not intentional harm, but the taskmaster's reasoning powers were atrophied, so that he blundered forward with old momentum rather than with new initiative. Every day he ill-used the little boy, who was his slave, trod upon his faculties, misled and perplexed him; and the victim was powerless to protest. Now that the little boy is a grown man, and free, his thoughts often revert to that former state of slavery, and the rancor rises in his soul as bitter as ever it was. He longs for the pen and tongue of a Cicero, a Junius, or a Dickens, with which to shape withering invective or revealing caricature.

Such a confession of animus might properly shake the reader's confidence, if the writer's earnestness were not a reasonable proof of his honesty. At his side is another little chap assigned by certain melancholy powers to the same bewildering enslavement, unless the God of Progress intervenes. I would save him, if I might, from Grammar, the bane of my own boyhood.

This attempt at constructive criticism, then, is inspired not by any personal experience as a teacher, but rather by the recollections of one small child who was the victim of certain traditional methods of teaching the use of English. As a grown-up small boy, even as a grown-up small girl, I make my assertions, — for there is, after all, very little sex in the mental equipment of a child.

The lad that I remember did not deal with theories. He learned almost wholly by practice. In his mental processes he went directly toward his desires. Moralizations and abstractions come with age, and his little mind had no place for them. He found the world

full of new things. His time was taken up with discoveries of new objects.

For you and me the recurring objective phenomena of life are nearly all found out. Our discoveries are generally new theories, new philosophies, and new morals to be drawn from everyday events. That child had little time to formulate theories for himself, and considerate Mother Nature had not yet equipped his mind for the ready-made deductions of others. In this characteristic he did not differ from the average children of his day, or of any other day, for that matter. In a paper published nearly twenty years ago, Prof. G. T. W. Patrick stated the matter very clearly. "It is a well-known fact," he wrote, "that a child's powers, whether physical or mental, ripen in a certain rather definite order. There is, for instance, a certain time in the life of the infant when the motor mechanism of the legs ripens, before which the child cannot be taught to walk, while after that time he cannot be kept from walking. Again, at the age of seven, for instance, there is a mental readiness for

some things and an unreadiness for others. The brain is then very impressionable and retentive, and a store of useful material, both motor and sensory, may be permanently acquired with great economy of effort. The imagination is active, and the child loves to listen to narration, whether historical or mythical, which plays without effort of his will upon his relatively small store of memory images. The powers of analysis, comparison, and abstraction are little developed, and the child has only a limited ability to detect mathematical or logical relations. The power of voluntary attention is slight, and can be exerted for only a short time. All this may be stated physiologically by saying that the brain activity is sensory and motor, but not central. The sensory and motor mechanism has ripened, but not the associative. The brain is hardly more than a receiving, recording, and reacting apparatus."

If you follow this sympathetically, you will agree that it points out, for one thing, the underlying weakness of the old-fashioned Sunday-school. That institution devoted itself

to an effort to teach small children the deductions of theology while their minds were not yet equipped for such things. The struggle to bring together the practical mind of the child and the abstractions of religious thought by means, usually, of untrained teachers, led to all sorts of *impasses*.

The little boy of my recollection labored each Sunday for a very brief period, with the aid of a perplexed teacher, to discover the moral in such stories as that of the fatted calf which was prepared for the wicked and not for the good brother; or of the smug Jacob who triumphed over Esau. The beclouded mentality of that youngster during the Sunday-school hour led him to seize and cling to certain abstract answers that he hoped might fit all abstract questions.

"What are we to learn from the lesson today?" said the teacher.

"To be good," said the small boy.

"Yes, yes, I know," said the teacher, with a certain embarrassment, "but what else are we to learn?" And the small boy found him-

self lost in the fog. His one safe answer had proved insufficient.

Abstract morals meant nothing to him. "Do not lie," said his elders, and yet he was lying every day, even to his sweetly understanding mother, who would listen smilingly when he told of his encounter with a rhinoceros on the way home. A lie meant nothing definite enough. He had never met a Lie as he went upon his way. He could understand it if he was told that he should not say to a playmate that his one-bladed knife, which he desired to swap "sight unseen", had two blades. He was fully old enough to understand the wrong of that; but that was not an abstraction.

I have wandered from my path to emphasize a particular idea. The little boy of my recollection never met a Lie among the objects that daily aroused anew his wonder and interest, or a Sacrifice or a Faith or a Contrition, and he was far less likely, when glancing out of the school-room window into the happy land of reality, to see a Verb or an Adjective or a

Participial Construction flying through the air or disporting itself upon the grass. He did not see a Least Common Multiple perching upon a branch of the neighboring tree, nor a Highest Common Denominator lurking behind the hedge.

It is interesting to note that arithmetic teachers in good elementary schools all over the land have been wiping from the slate these confusing abstractions; they are even doing away with the use of large numbers, on the theory that a small boy can imagine 101, and apply it to concrete things, but he cannot comprehend as an actuality 7,756,821; they have found that the principles of arithmetic may be mastered more quickly and thoroughly by means of comprehendible numbers than by means of incomprehendible ones. Yet, while arithmetic teachers have been doing away with these things, strange to say, teachers of English and elementary textbooks on the art of composition still hold to abstractions even less justifiable, until little brains have addled in their little pates, and children have been driven

even to physical revolt at the thought of "grammar."

Any form of self-expression is an art, not a science. It has no scientific rules of procedure. Much time has been wasted on the teaching of "composition" by theory. For theoretical purposes a system of nomenclature has been utilized relating first to parts of speech, and then to exposition, argumentation, narration, and the like; and finished products have been dissected as scientifically as possible and then reconstructed by means of such arbitrary divisions. It is safe to say that as a result much of our classroom teaching of written composition has done little good and often considerable harm.

Those who work with college students in the field of written composition are frequently heard to assert that the secondary school failed to do its part when their pupils were under its care; and, in turn, high-school teachers universally insist that they are handicapped by the failure of the lower grades to provide this same instruction. It is probable

that in all of these stages there are various errors in method, rather than one general fault prevailing throughout. Yet I confidently believe that the abolition of slavery to "grammar" in the earliest years would result in vastly greater strength all along the road.

"But," said a teacher only yesterday — a woman occupying the position of assistant principal in a large elementary school — "how are my pupils to study Latin later on if they have not learned English by the grammatical method?" In other words, if my baby does not learn to walk by means of a balancing-rod along a crack in the floor, how can I teach him later in life to advance on the tight-rope?

Here is a curious thing to contemplate: rules of technical grammar which are necessary for the mastery of Latin, because it is a dead language of fixed regularity, are not taught *in Latin*, but *in English*. Yet rules of technical grammar, which so many elementary textbooks claim are essential to a child's mastery of English, are taught to the child in English — profound English, at that — on the assumption

that he already has a fair control of the language they pretend to teach. Let me quote at random from the latest edition of a widely used textbook in composition, and from a chapter intended for children approximately eleven years old:

"A combination of words performing a distinct office in a sentence, and having a subject and a predicate, is a clause. A clause that expresses the leading or principal thought of a sentence is an independent or principal clause; as, If our cause is just, *we shall succeed.* A clause that depends upon some other part of the sentence for its full meaning is a dependent or subordinate clause; as, *If our cause is just*, we shall succeed. Copy the following sentences, and draw lines under the dependent clauses," etc., etc.

If my little boy can grasp and wield that, he already knows English pretty well without it. What, then, is he to do with it? It will not lead him to better forms of expression in his composition. It will not strengthen his vocabulary. He will not hark back to it in future

years in order to determine whether he is expressing himself according to the best standards. Moreover, he did not suffer from the lack of it when he mastered the elementary forms of oral expression outside the classroom.

Is it not safe to assert that a classroom where such textbook material dominates the method of instruction has done and can do nothing for him? He steps from the oral work of his own home and playground, where he is acquiring by absorption and imitation such English as he finds there for daily use, into the schoolroom atmosphere of unreality and abstraction, finding nothing there to win his interest or to make him feel that "English" is a vital thing.

Listen to a phrase from the preface of that same textbook: "This book provides for three years' work, and is intended for pupils who are beginning to write English. The leading aims of the work are to develop the child's power of thought, to aid him in forming habits of correct expression, and to give him a taste for good literature. . . . By means of simple exercises

in dictation, reproduction, narration, and description, he is given varied practice *in using the same fact again and again.*" (The italics are mine.)

Heaven help the poor little chap! It may be well enough for him to assert solemnly once in his class exercise that, if his cause is just, he will succeed, but if he is to use the same fact again and again to demonstrate the various technical terms involved in his classroom drill, it is possible that his thoughts may wander. Mine did, even today.

But let us not attempt to prove the case by one particular textbook. A formidable array lies before me on my table, and the very sight of them seems to draw me back into boyhood's classroom atmosphere where book and teacher were arrayed against me in a seven years' war. Again at random, from a chapter intended for children approximately eleven years old, this time from a book written by two distinguished college professors: "The copula sometimes ties together the subject and a noun or pronoun which explains the sub-

ject, as in the sentence, John is my brother. The noun following the copula in the predicate is called a predicate noun. Find the predicate noun in each of the following sentences. Name the parts of each sentence."

Here are a few of the "following sentences":

A friend in need is a friend indeed.
The child is father of the man.
The trees are Indian princes.
Brevity is the soul of wit.
The virtue of prosperity is temperance, the virtue of adversity is fortitude.

Eleven years old! And, by the way, this "copula" has an unfamiliar sound. Can it be that new terms are springing in this day and generation full panoplied from the head of some pedagogical Jove?

From another book, and again absolutely at random: "If you observe closely, you will notice that the complements you supplied in the last exercise are of two kinds: 1. Complements that name the subject or describe it by denoting some quality or attribute of it; as, The first President was Washington. The

complement, Washington, names the subject. The earth is round. Round denotes an attribute of the earth. 2. Complements that name the object which receives the action performed by the subject and expressed by the verb; as, The Romans built ships. Ships is the object that receives the action performed by the subject, Romans, and expressed by the verb, built. . . . In the twenty-five sentences of the preceding exercise you were required to supply twenty complements. Write these complements in two columns, placing in the first all those naming the object that receives the action expressed by the verb. . . . The attribute complement completes the predicate by naming or describing the subject. An object complement completes the predicate by naming that which receives the action expressed by the verb."

I beg you to read that last selection once more, aloud if you please, and then clear the atmosphere by reciting:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.

One or another of the books quoted above is being used in this country by vast numbers of children from nine to fourteen years old. True, they survive. They even pass examinations in it.

> And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
> Come to my arms, my beamish boy.

But they do not go to high school and thence to college with ability to write good English.

What shall we do with this thing called grammar? It is an abstract science, highly technical, however it may be tempered for forcing into the minds of ten-year-olds, and it is afflicted with a terminology as obscure and meaningless to the young as would be that in the pharmacopœia. Of course, there is mental discipline to be gained from close application to the study of it, but let us use it, then, frankly for that purpose, and not persuade inexperienced or incompetent young school-teachers in our training-schools that it is a means to the attainment of oral and written expression in English.

"How," says my assistant principal, "shall we teach our pupils Latin without it?" Why should we attempt to do so? I yield to none in my respect for the study of Latin. It is in connection with that study that technical grammar, its rules and its terminology, may be first brought into use. English has always been mastered without it, or, may I say, in spite of it, and its distinctions and terms will have more meaning and arouse more interest to a student in high school, or even in college, if he meets them there for the first time.

"Should you be inconvenienced," I asked a Latin teacher in a public high school of New York City, — that city whose elementary schools have been so notoriously enslaved in this field, "if your pupils came to you with no knowledge whatever of the terms and definitions of English grammar?" The question in such extreme form was apparently new to her, and she answered it thoughtfully: "No, I should not. The technical grammar that our pupils need has to be taught to them all over again after they come to us. Either they have

forgotten all they ever learned or else they cannot apply it."

If they did not apply to English this strange gibberish that was thrust upon them in their elementary years, should they be expected to set it reverently aside for application to Latin later on? That they do not apply it to their English is most effectively proved by a recent careful investigation throughout the schools of Kansas City, supplemented by similar investigations in Columbia, Missouri; Bonham, Texas; and Detroit, Michigan. A survey of all discovered errors in the children's oral speech and in their written papers indicated that the percentage of common grammatical errors in the sixth and seventh grades (in which grades technical grammar is taught) was actually higher than the percentage of errors for all other grades. After summarizing the result of this investigation in a most interesting address before the National Education Association, Mr. H. B. Wilson, Superintendent of the Topeka schools, added the comment, "These data, while quite differently

derived, corroborate the conclusion of Hoyt in 1906 that the extended study of technical grammar does not enable one to use better English either in talking or writing."

"I recall," said Superintendent Wilson in the same address, "that in the lower grades of the elementary schools my teachers were at great pains to demonstrate objectively, with an elaborate tellurian, the movements of the earth in relation to the sun and moon in the solar system. It was beautifully objective, but I am absolutely certain I had no worth-while appreciation of the significance of the demonstration. All of us have seen very learned teachers, with access to a great museum, give very extensively illustrated nature-study lessons without the children ever realizing once that the birds or other animal forms which were being illustrated in the class exercise were the same as those about the homes and gardens where they lived."

If even this is true, how can we expect little children to apply abstract data regarding the proper behavior of adverbs, participles, predi-

cates, verbals, and copulas — Heaven preserve us! — to everyday speech?

If I might have freed that little boy from the thraldom of grammar, what should have taken its place in that old school-room that he found so painfully unrelated to the life outside? There are two fundamentals that have received slight attention in most of our school-rooms where composition is taught. The mastery of them alone will not make a skilled writer, but their pursuit will use school-room time to real advantage. These two things are control of a flexible, well-equipped colloquial vocabulary and a sympathetic consideration of the reader's point of view.

Here are two lines of study, widely different in character, that must be followed in order to accomplish a single result — skill in writing. The first, that having to do with the vocabulary, surely cannot be gained by any scientific system. Control of a vocabulary comes not by theorizing and not by analysis, but by absorption and then by practice. The second fundamental is still more impossible of attain-

ment by means of a scientific method. Its pursuit involves considerations apparently remote from all the treatises upon composition that have come to my attention.

For it is astonishing to observe how generally the teaching of composition in schools has failed, not only to emphasize, but even to mention the fact that two equally important people are involved in every written exercise — the writer and the reader. Of course, this fact is often overlooked outside the schoolroom. Many adults who are practised in the art of writing have failed to recognize it. What avails a wonderful sermon, if it means nothing to the particular group of people hearing it? What avails a perfect piece of argumentation, if it fails to reach the understanding or the emotion of its audience? There are certainly great numbers of preachers whose attention is so constantly upon the sermons they are writing that they give too little consideration to the congregation they are addressing. Many speakers forget, while they are preparing an address, that the perfection of material is

only half of the work in hand; a consideration of the audience is the other half. Of what avail is a splendid accumulation of theories of teaching if you find you are not reaching the brains and the hearts of your pupils? Surely no one denies that it would be better, in that case, to discard all theories, and be only a loving man or woman working and playing with the child. The art of teaching is not for the art's sake, but for the child's sake.

After all, not many people are left to-day who hold to a belief in "art for art's sake." We have come at length to realize that art is for life's sake; but we should carry this principle closer to the study of the art of writing, and say that written composition of any kind *is not good* unless it communicates to the reader in full measure the purpose of its writer.

All this seems to be of little interest to our wearied and perplexed small boy in his primary classroom. Yet we wandered away from him with a definite purpose. I have attempted to tear the grammar from his textbook, and now

I will tear out the remaining pages. For the exercises in composition that I find there are all addressed to his teacher. If it be true that half the secret of good writing lies in a sympathetic consideration of the reader's point of view, then we must bid our children write to children and not to adults. My small boy's practice must have nothing to do with theories and abstractions, but must deal with the everyday life that surrounds little children. His task must be to interest his associates.

His chief limitation for the work in hand is vocabulary. Ideas come rapidly enough if the atmosphere be normal. All that he possesses must be spent and spent again — colloquialisms, slang, and all. It is when he attempts to overdraw his account that the teacher stands ready with new coin for the transaction. That classroom must be a lively, laughing, chatting exchange, dealing with realities. It is the last place in the school for a textbook.

Consider that these children are gathered together for the purpose of learning to communicate ideas by means of written English.

They must first formulate the ideas. This they are doing all the time outside the classroom. If they can become their lively-minded, normal selves rather than automatons inside the classroom, these ideas will reveal themselves. But they are children's ideas, not adults'. Standards of good English will not be established in their minds by a vain repetition of, "If our cause is just, we shall succeed," or similar textbook material.

To express their ideas these children in the elementary schools must have vocabulary. If all the time that has been devoted to technical grammar in the school life of children ten to fourteen years old had been given to word-mastering, there would be better writing in high school. The spoken vocabularies of our school children in grammar grades, says a competent authority, average from five hundred to one thousand words. Let children bring regularly to the classroom new words of their own discovery and donate them for class use until mastered by all; this would be a better game than diagraming a sentence to indicate

the dependent participial clauses attached to the predicate. If they bring their home dialects and their street slang, so much the better. The walls of the school-room must not shut out all sound of the outside world. Most important of all, what they write must be tested by the interest of their associates. There should be a classroom full of critics whose tongues are untied.

What part has the teacher in this program? She is director, stimulator, and final authority. Without a text-book, but with common sense, she points out good models in many books, or in that ubiquitous home textbook, the newspaper. And, above all, she keeps them writing, for an art is mastered, after all, only by practice. "Ah," says my school principal, "but I cannot find enough primary teachers competent to carry out such a program." Perhaps that is a chief reason for the survival of grammar as the bane of boyhood. A poor teacher must go by rule and formula. Take away her book and she is lost. My little boy must study grammar for the sake of his teacher.

III

IMPRESSION AND EXPRESSION

It is an established principle of education that the mind is benefited not only by the storing up of data but also by the giving forth of it, — by acquiring not only orderly methods of accumulation but also effective methods of expression. To debate their relative value is as though one argued on the question — Resolved: it is more important to breathe in than to breathe out.

Clear thinking is necessary in order to get clear and effective expression, but the acquirement of clear and effective expression brings about clear thinking. Slovenly speech not only indicates a slovenly mind, but it may help to cause a slovenly mind; no speech at all tends to produce no mind at all.

A teacher in the New York School for the Deaf made the following assertions, proved by her own experience: "Like the hearing child, the deaf pupil refuses to do much thinking until he has *words*. He is actually waiting in a forlorn, belated babyhood — for words. And he gives weight to a great psychologist's contention that thought itself is words — inner speech. . . . To a child whose mind has been seriously hindered by his deafness, there comes a distinct awakening during such a course of lip and tongue training. It is like a miracle, a never-ceasing wonder to the teacher who learns to watch for it. And once it has happened, the child goes ahead with a speed before impossible to him."

What is true of the infant or the deaf mute is true of the student of every age and condition; what we are not able to express is less than half learned. Most of my own generation, for instance, who studied German or French for two or three years in college, never heard the language spontaneously spoken in the classroom during that time. Numbers of us are

testifying that the hours spent on modern languages were largely wasted. It is safe to assert that in a multitude of colleges in this country, including some of high repute, modern languages are still taught by teachers who cannot converse in them, and the language is never given spontaneous expression in any classroom. Scientists do not permit such methods. Principles governing chemical action are taught, theories are discussed, and textbooks are read in one part of the time devoted to chemistry, and all are given expression in the laboratory in another part of the time assigned to that course; and the work done in gaining impression and the work done in giving expression both are credited to the student in determining whether he is fit for a degree.

What of English? In our high schools and colleges what method is followed in teaching students to gain a scholar's mastery of their native tongue? Methods are changing, it is true. Yet this year I visited a college which boasts a single-minded devotion to pure scholarship, — not scholarship for its own sake, but

scholarship for life's sake; a training is there provided that aims to lay a foundation of fine general culture, to quicken perceptions and to make available for the field of affairs every faculty of the mind that a boy possesses. Yet I found only one course devoted to written expression in English, and this course could not be observed because it happened that it was not given during that particular half-year. Courses devoted to *impression* were there in plenty. Students of English read the works of the masters; they studied the history and technique of the novel and the drama; they were guided to appreciation of poetry; but of courses in *expression* there was none.

Such a condition is not accidental, nor is it the result of inertia or insufficient means. It is due to the fact that some authorities feel that written expression should not be treated as a separate course of study. It is an inevitable part of every course, they say. The student of Economics or Philosophy, or the History of the English Drama, must from time

to time make written expositions of what he has learned. These papers furnish drill in written expression in English. English expression, they say, must be a by-product of every department in school or college, and it is not proper or profitable to devote the work of a classroom wholly to a consideration of form; the same classroom must supply the matter. In other words, the work of a class devoted primarily to expression will produce but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.

Such an argument, while it is good in theory, does not work in practice. College papers are not, as a whole, well written. The colleges are graduating great numbers of students who do not express themselves effectively. The fact is that teachers of Economics and Philosophy, Physics and Astronomy cannot devote much attention to the style and form of written papers. They must be interested chiefly in the accuracy of the matter, and have far too little time as it is. This is evidenced by the fact that the reading of class papers is so often left to technically trained assistants just

out of college, who themselves may not be able to produce or effectively criticize good English form and style.

There is an especial reason why classrooms devoted to English expression should today be increasing in number. Two generations ago college drill in the ancient languages provided the best possible training in the English of that day. The translation of Greek and Latin, and even Hebrew, was required in proportionately great quantity. Originals were regularly rendered into English verse, as well as into fine prose. Orations were thought out in English, translated into Latin, and understood by student audiences. The training in English expression that came from this classroom work made stately stylists of our grandfathers. Even the intimate personal letters that they wrote are enough proof of this. But Latin and Greek do not receive the amount of attention that they did, or demand the same universal and exacting drill, and so this splendid by-product of the old classic classroom has suffered. The English department must assume

the entire burden, and certainly it cannot complain.

If the acquiring of style in written English is to be the whole purpose of the work in my classroom, how shall I go about it? *Style* is taste in the use of words, a cultivated "ear", a sense of rhythm and proportion, plus individual habits of thought. These things are to so great an extent dependent upon Providence that teachers come to feel that "writers" cannot be made in the classroom. I will not dispute the statement until we have some definition before us. If a writer is one who takes up writing as a vocation, to make a living by it, or one who loves words and phrases for their own sakes as well as for what they may convey, — an *artist* in words, — then the school or college will not create him any more than it can create any instinct, — it can only foster it. But many schools have done something negative to our young people that I find it hard to define. I can best describe it as a self-consciousness in the company of pencil and paper, often so pronounced that it seems to benumb the senses.

Many a one who can face me and describe with vividness and artistry a scene or stirring experience, will gaze into the expressionless face of a blank sheet of paper and find his mental functions atrophied. Something in his previous experience has led him to view with alarm a situation that brings him and this inquiring, accusing blank page and pencil together.

If I could but persuade him to see the face of an interested reader as he gazes upon that unwritten page! If he would only undertake each bit of composition as though it were part of a letter to a friendly acquaintance, stately or informal as his mood or the occasion demands. Let me but bring about that attitude of mind, and half my battle is won.

If you will agree with me to define a "writer" as one who can set down upon paper a simple and clear account of facts or ideas, revealing at the same time something of his own personality in the process, then I assert that such writers can be a product of this classroom.

For a textbook I want at first only the daily newspaper, not merely because it is already

familiar, but because it is the most remarkable product of written expression in our age. This morning's paper doubtless contains many sins, both of omission and commission, but here is a fact to be considered. That thrilling novel which you have just finished was written by William Henry Jones in three months of steady labor; the material which he put into it, of personal experience and research, took him several years to accumulate, and the result is one hundred and twenty thousand words revealing the author's interpretation of life in a small neighborhood. Today's paper contains an equal number of words. It reveals a cross-section of life in the world at large, reproduced by trained interpreters, and the greater part of the material in it was assembled and written within a space of twenty-four hours. The notable thing about it is not the fact that it makes mistakes, but that it is as good as it is, and that it succeeded in training most of its writers in its own classrooms, often having to overcome, first of all, some negative work of the schools.

There are many interesting generalizations to be found in my textbook, and one might lecture interminably to a class on newspaper mechanics and office regulations, and above all, newspaper ethics, and draw many morals therefrom. But it is better to dwell upon a very few things, if they are worth while, and I would have as a text for almost my only sermon the fact that a newspaper aims to separate its news and its editorials! If a year's work in a college class could be successfully devoted to this one point, the existence of that classroom would be justified. How many speakers, how many writers, — how many everyday people, — are willing and able to state facts uncolored by personal opinion, — to separate news and editorial?

So I start off upon my work with this analysis of my textbook, that it has certain pages for the news, where facts alone should appear, and it has other pages where editorial opinions regarding those facts may be expressed.

Students who are alive to this distinction quickly discover instances wherein eminent newspapers flagrantly violate this fundamental

principle. One, for instance, promptly handed me a clipping from a reputable New York paper which pretended to report upon a news-page a speech by Mr. Bryan with the following introduction: "If in some future time, even that dim future when William Jennings Bryan has ceased railing at preparedness as he did last night in the Academy of Music in Brooklyn some belligerent foreign nation should declare war upon us, all we have to do is reply, 'No!' . . . What rejoinder the above-mentioned belligerent nation will make to that remark the Apostle of Peace did not tell the audience which listened for two hours while he railed at war, scoffed at rumors of war, and sneered at preparedness for defense against war." Such a travesty upon news should be driven to the editorial page. If a public speaker, whoever he may be, is entitled to any hearing at all, he is entitled to a fair one. The newspaper which disagrees with his views is entitled to a full and vigorous expression of editorial opinion, but it is not entitled to color or distort or lie about his statements.

This question of the separation of news and editorial is a question of fairness and honesty, — a great question of morals, — and in it lies the ultimate test of our public press. But in my class I am treating it simply as a question of form, and agreeing to take up first the matter of news, if only because it is presented first in my textbook.

"Get the news, get all the news, and nothing but the news," said Charles A. Dana to his reporters, and his description of a competent writer in the reportorial field is worth quoting at greater length. "The reporter must give his story in such a way that you know he feels its qualities and events and is interested in them," he said. "He must learn accurately the facts, and he must state them exactly as they are; and if he can state them with a little degree of life, a little approach to eloquence, or a little humor in his style, why his report will be perfect. It must be accurate; it must be free from affectation; it must be well set forth, so that there shall not be any doubt as to any part or detail of it; and then if it is enlivened

with imagination, or with feeling, with humor, you have a literary product that no one need be ashamed of. Any man who is sincere and earnest, and not always thinking about himself, can be a good reporter."

The business of my classroom should be not to train reporters, but to find whether there is in this training of reporters something that will teach the everyday business of good writing. In other words, it is my task to prove that the college, as well as Mr. Dana's city room, can make of anyone who is sincere and earnest, and not always thinking about himself, a good narrator of facts.

The news-editor seems to have two aims in mind, to win and hold the attention of his readers, and to convey to them clearly a knowledge of facts. He wins attention first of all by his captions, and I have turned to them as the first lesson in my textbook.

Many as are the faults of average classroom "themes", perhaps the greatest is the student's apparent uncertainty as to just exactly what he is writing about. He begins with a general

topic in mind, in case one has been assigned, and he writes inconsequently until his time or his information has given out, and then stops. At least in the latter case it is to be hoped that he stops. There is little preconceived plan. Now, for a reporter to write his captions first would be putting the cart before the horse, assuming it to be his business to write captions at all. But when I ask my students to consider what captions are to go above each news-story, and whether the story suggests any captions at all, I am forcing them to know beforehand just what they are writing about, and to consider whether there are any sensational, interest-arousing points among their facts. If they pick them out beforehand with captions in mind they are practically sorting their facts with chief consideration for their reader's point of view; that is what I wish, somehow or other, to bring about.

The obvious fact about these captions is that they aim to arouse, — to create a sensation. The writer of them is thinking of his readers all the time. He varies their character

to suit the particular class of reader his paper is seeking. He searches his story for the facts that will supply material for such a caption as he wants. I asked my students first of all to spread out in their minds the facts of Paul Revere's ride as well as they recalled them, and formulate captions as though the events occurred yesterday, sacrificing good taste for the moment, if necessary, in an effort to arouse their readers. Some of these results were amusing. Many were most satisfactory. If my students were to rewrite them at the year's end, they would use fewer words, eliminating colorless or non-essential ones, and they would turn some of their old captions rear-end foremost, because of the better sense of emphasis that they have gained in the meantime.

"WAR — First Blood Shed at Lexington — English Fired First Shot — Ninety Heroes Killed — Villages Saved by Wild Midnight Ride of Daring Youth."

"BRITISH REGULARS REPULSED BY PREPARED FARMERS — Midnight Rider Warns Middlesex County of Approaching Danger — Young Bostonian Hero of the Day

— Says He Waited Signal-Lights from North Church Belfry."

"YOUTHFUL PATRIOT GALLOPS THROUGH NIGHT TO WARN HANCOCK AND ADAMS — Revere Rouses Countryside and Saves Day for Lexington — Double Lantern Signal Figures in Daring Midnight Expedition — British Officers Take Hero Prisoner but He Escapes."

"TOWNS WARNED BY DARING DENTIST — Revere Rides with News of British Troops' Departure from Boston — Woman May Have Let Out Secret — Hero Eats Big Breakfast and Chats with Reporters."

"BRITISH ARMY INVADES MASSACHUSETTS — All Wires around Boston Cut by Spies — Revere in High Power Car Breaks All Speed Records — Rouses Lexington Militia at Midnight with Shrieks of Claxon — News of British March Leaks Out through Wife of General Gage."

I want my students to think in captions, studying the examples served fresh every day in my ubiquitous textbook, and I ask them to criticize, condemn, and improve, with all the ingenuity they inevitably display when interest is aroused.

This caption-sense, this idea of relative interest-values, is akin to the "nose for news" which the reporter must possess or acquire. With such development of it as I can bring about in so short a time I start upon news-stories. Material appears daily in and about the classroom. I do not ask students to rewrite the news of the outside world to any great extent, simply because they are not then reporting their own observations; but I ask them to sift and select the happenings of this smaller world in order to find those that justify stirring captions, and then serve them up in ways best suited to this classroom audience. Sometimes I have wished them to have in mind readers in Kankakee or Medicine Hat, and then serve up their facts so as best to win a laggard attention. The facts — all the facts — must be there, clear and concise; but with a best foot foremost! That first sentence may win or lose a reader. Let it be big with news or suggestion of news, let it hint or tantalize, — anything so it be not dull!

For another prevailing sin of the traditional

classroom theme is dullness, — deadly monotone. I suspect that sometimes that oppressed, unnatural condition of a student's mind when he stares into the accusing countenance of a blank sheet of paper is due to the fact that he hesitates to bore others as others have bored him. I do not fear, for the time being, an exaggeration of emphasis or attempts at ultra-sensational appeal, so long as the facts themselves are facts, set down in order, concisely, with sentences as short as may be, for clearness' sake. *Style* that is an evidence of the individual personality may come later if it will, and good taste will eventually take care of over-sensationalism. But the purpose of any writing is to reach aud hold a reader (otherwise why write?) and dullness is a deadly sin.

I have been alert to offer suggestions for news-stories of all sorts. It is better for students to discover the occurrence that justifies the story, but if they do not, I would have them come to me, for I want to keep them writing. No art can be mastered without con-

stant practice in it. The painter must be ever working with canvas. The sculptor must be forever modelling his clay. The most satisfactory news material that I have been able to provide is the interview. So I have seized upon visiting lecturers, fellow faculty-members, personages of the town, — anyone who is himself a story or who has one to tell. And after some experience I have found it desirable to suggest to the "interviewee" that a certain amount of reticence or evasion will be welcome. I would have my students forced to ask questions in order to bring out a story, and I have tried to make it clear to them that a reporter is likely to come away from an interview empty-handed unless he goes to it with a pretty definite idea of what he wants to get. He cannot waste time with vague or purposeless questions. He must have, in fact, possible captions in mind. He must scent a story, and go after that story keenly. Then, if the personage reveals unsuspected treasures, so much the better. He can readily revise his plans, and feature some statement that he had not foreseen.

At these interviews, I have asked my students to appoint certain ones of their number as spokesmen. These are expected to make note of the lines of questioning their various associates wish to pursue, and are then under obligation to get these into the interview so far as possible. By this method a perplexed or embarrassed visitor is spared a shower of questions from every direction. Before the time allowed for the interview is quite over, general questioning is permitted, in case the spokesmen have failed in their trust, or new ideas for a story have occurred to this or that listener.

In these interviews a new consideration is involved. The story must be interesting, of course, with a stimulating beginning and a suitable climax, and it must contain all of the essential news-data which justify it, — but it must also consider the rights of the person interviewed. He must be treated with fairness and consideration. Sometimes he obviously has said what he doesn't mean. Sometimes he is forced by a poor line of questioning or by his own temperament to give rambling and in-

consequential replies. He must be spared an exact reproduction of all this, not only for the sake of the reader, but for his own sake. Moreover, if he expresses any wish that the reporter should withhold anything that he has said, especially if he has said it through a desire to make clear other statements that are for publication, this confidence must not under any circumstances be betrayed. There is no phrase condemnatory enough to describe such an act of betrayal.

I have referred to this form of possible class assignment at greater length because it makes so many demands. Students have spoiled good stories by reporting with remarkable accuracy the words of the person interviewed, yet failing to measure the relative values of the statements he has made, and thus they have created a false impression. Truth-telling, even as most simply defined, is difficult enough, but it becomes a doubly difficult responsibility when we define it as the creating of accurate impressions in the mind of the reader. As a theme for profitable class discussion I describe

how the newspaper artists at the front in the Boer war were required to paint smoke into their battle pictures, though smokeless powder had then come into use. Only thus could these artists convey to the conventional minds of their public a sense of battle action and the sound of guns.

Often my interviewers have failed to see the most interesting fact of all, namely, themselves putting questions. When a certain distinguished ex-President faced an eager circle of students, nothing that he said was so interesting as the picture itself, and yet he said much that was essentially interesting, because questions were ingenuously asked him that no trained reporter would have dared to ask, and he answered with a frankness and an enjoyment that would not have been provoked by a professional interviewer. Perhaps it is too much for me to expect this detachment, and yet I am asking them as quondam reporters to seek the sensational and the picturesque in news situations, and surely "Ex-President of the United States Interviewed" is less stimulat-

ing to the interest than "Ex-President Interviewed by Amateur Reporters."

In the free selection of news by my students I have felt confident that they would sooner or later present facts that arouse their prejudices and opinions. So, very soon, I ask for brief editorials based upon their news-stories. I ask for dignity in criticism — something constructive, rather than mere scolding. I ask for the "editorial we", rather than "I", so that they may select subjects that they think worthy of discussion by a board of editors, let us say, and feel the responsibility of speaking for a group rather than upon their own individual whim. In a "letter to the editor", on the other hand, they are permitted to be more intimate, more colloquial, refer to personal experience, in fact go as far as they care or dare publicly over their own names.

It is always necessary at first to suggest to some individuals subjects for editorials. Their ability to find subjects for themselves is not developed, or their tendency may be to select

topics not worth discussion; and time given to such editorials would be neither profitable nor entertaining.

There are forms of practical composition in which it is important to combine news with editorial, — fact with opinion. The book review, for instance, that potentially delightful little essay, actually so deeply rutted in certain conventional forms that it struggles for vocabulary, is properly a combination of news and editorial. Has the reviewer somewhere in his work supplied the pure unadulterated news about his book? Does he tell honestly what it is about, how it approaches its subject, and other necessary data, so that someone who may be seeking the book for that very data will learn that here is what he wants? Or does the reviewer color or becloud every descriptive statement with his own opinion as to the book's goodness or badness, so that it gets no chance for a hearing, even from those who should be its sympathetic friends?

In connection with this business of critical reviewing I have assigned my students at the

end of the calendar year a task that required the summarizing of much material in few words, with their own interpretative judgment upon it, — namely, surveys of the year in various fields: certain ones reviewed the past year in Art, others in Science, others in Religious Thought, in Fiction, in Poetry, in Finance, in Our Foreign Relations, and so on; these were published by a local newspaper and we thereby gained some brief practical drill in proof-reading.

All this sounds prosaic enough, but there has been no insistence upon prose! With only slight encouragement verse makes its appearance, both free and restrained, and I welcome it for the condensation it requires, and the flexibility of vocabulary it should bring about. Book reviews condensed into quatrains and still retaining their "news" and "editorial" data prove well worth reading, and many who vow at first that verse is out of the question achieve triumphs. As for twenty-minute "poems", written in class on a subject assigned on the spur of the moment, I ask no more

sensational achievement! And yet I do not approve any verses that fail to meet the requirements the writers themselves set at the start. Rhymes must be rhymes, — and there must be a rhyme for every line. Verse forms must be correct, and scan without a struggle! It is light verse that I am speaking of now, and not poetry. Any poetic variant of form may be justified by the beauty of the thought, but light verse is justified only by painstaking mechanical accuracy.

In book reviews, editorials, light verses, students must keep in mind those interest-arousing qualities of opening sentence and that satisfaction of climax which we sought in our presentation of the news. Then finally I ask them to wander into a new field which they have skirted from time to time in editorials and letters. For now and then, with some, there has come into their editorial writing a certain personality of style and a tendency to argue the point in an intimate, chatty fashion. It is hard to say where the editorial ends and the essay begins, but it is evident that attempts

at essays will only be of value when the writers choose subjects with which they are on intimate, friendly terms; and they must let themselves go with abandon to the pleasure of writing. I do not expect to get good essays from each, nor do I want to. The world would be a sorry place if we all were of the same temperament, and those who are most practical and matter-of-fact, most capable in their clear reporting of facts or in their effective array of arguments in support of a proposition, may be at their poorest when they are led into the field of speculative, reflective, philosophizing, gossipy chats that we have come to call essays.

Yet those who cannot write an essay are fully as capable of enjoying a good one, and they will enjoy them the more for having made this effort themselves. Partly to cultivate their power of appreciation, and partly to stir them from some small rut of ineffective style that they might have fallen into, I ask each one to take back his essay and rewrite the first page of it in imitation of some one of the masters, holding to the subject and to the very material

of his own first page, but using the tricks and verbal mannerisms of Lamb, or Hazlitt, or Chesterton, or whom he will.

The college year is too short for all of this program; in fact for each point in it. There is little time for detailed attention to the choice of words and the branding of threadbare phrases. With a large class there is too little time to hand back every one of these literary undertakings marked up with suggestions for rewriting; and yet perhaps there is such a thing as too much attention to some pieces of work! The greatest value lies in the reading aloud of all work in class. Sooner or later each has heard others read papers better than his own, and intelligent criticism and comparison of one's own work gives real force and vitality to anything an instructor might say.

Toward the close of the year work should be assigned with two ideas in mind; the first, to assign to each one, so far as possible, some kind of work best suited to the individual, and the second, to provide each day enough variety

in the reading program to make the hour an interesting one.

One point I desire to emphasize in conclusion; the work would lose a great part of its value without freely expressed class criticism. To obtain it in good measure we have to overcome a certain human weakness which tends to make young people, and people no longer young, take criticism of work too personally. A good deal of time may profitably be spent in creating a class attitude of impersonality. No written work should ever be anonymous, and there should be the greatest possible freedom of open and direct comment. The teacher may well watch for evidences of that temperament which resents clear-cut discussion of a paper, and himself become almost unduly personal, whenever he guesses that such an attitude exists!

The aim of the work in such a class is to help each one to express himself clearly and effectively with certain readers in mind; after that to reveal as much of his personality as possible through that elusive something we call

"style", and finally to create if possible some little enjoyment of writing for its own sake. But there are three by-products of such a classroom as this which are actually of as great value as any of the direct objects of our work. The first is avoidance of affectation, — honesty in expression; another is impersonality in criticism, — a readiness to give and take, in discussion, without bitterness or irritation; the third, and perhaps the most important, is that ability to recognize the difference between news and editorial, — fact and opinion, — and to keep them distinct.

IV

ESSAYING AN ESSAY

"However little we write," says Mr. Ernest Rhys, "whether for our friends only or for the newspapers, we have to attempt sooner or later something which is virtually an essay." Then let us go about it now, consciously; first of course endeavoring to learn the boundaries and definitions, if there be any, of this special literary form, and strive to hold our thoughts to the prescribed area.

Mr. Rhys says further: "We are gradually made aware of a particular fashion, a talking mode (shall we say?) of writing, as natural, almost as easy as speech itself; one that was bound to settle itself at length and take on a propitious fashion of its own. . . . Just as we may say there is a lyric tongue, which the true poets of that kind have contributed to

form, so there is an essayist's style or way with words — something between talking and writing. . . . It may preach, but it must never be a sermon; it may moralize, but it must never be too forbidding; it may be witty, high spirited, effervescent as you like, but it must never be flippant or betray a mean spirit or a too conscious clever pen."

With such a charming and unmistakable description as this before us let us seek no further for a definition, but, following its guidance so far as God gives us ability, ourselves wander into this field that demands "something between talking and writing", confident that a suitable style lies within our reach, if we only may do away with that self-consciousness which causes the implements of the writing desk to stand as a sort of barrier between ourselves and you, the reader.

Three things I have in mind as essential to any essay. The first is sincerity. It ought to be easy to define that quality, and yet I would not have you understand that the essayist may write only what is true. Charles

Lamb undoubtedly departed from fact when he described the first roasting of pig. Yet when he wrote it he was being true to himself, and that is the chief function of truth.

At a former time I have had occasion to speak of that interesting phenomenon, the amateur writer who in natural, intimate speech reveals his true self, but when he turns to the written word reveals another being, stilted, awkward and insincere. I compared his written style to the "photograph face" of certain people who, when facing the camera, re-arrange their features into an expression that represents neither themselves nor any other natural creation under heaven. Yet such an individual might deliberately "make a long nose" at the photographer, and I should call the expression sincere. So the essayist who intentionally assumes grandiloquence, or fantastic humor, may be as sincere as when writing grave and simple phrases to express those sentiments with which he will not play. In fact I think that I love him best when he plays at pedantry or pomposity, or at any other way

with words. He seems somehow to be taking me more into his confidence, — into the inner circle of his friends, — when he consents to lay aside for the time being that more formal dress with which his thought is usually clothed!

My second essential for this or any other essay I consider quite equal to the first in importance; in fact, I shall place all three essentials first, and have no second and third. The second of my first essentials, therefore, is this: that the essay shall all of it come directly from the writer's mind rather than from the written or spoken word of another. For many years a quotation has lingered in my memory though the name of its writer has slipped away: "If a man write a book, let him say what he knows; I have guesses enough of my own." So if a man write an essay, let him say what he himself thinks. He may,—indeed he must,— have sources innumerable, but the gleanings from those sources must have been through the mill of his mind, and be kneaded and mixed according to the writer's own private recipe.

Number three of these first essentials is that

the essayist shall gossip with his reader; and I have hurried through my other two requirements that I might dwell at greater length upon this final one, and let my plea in its behalf include some insistence upon the other two.

It occurs to me now, as I chat with you, that some real essay might well begin here; and if you have been wearied so far by anything assertive or verbose, let me beg you to overlook all of the foregoing, and call the following an essay upon gossip.

Gossip — "God + sib" say the dictionaries, — God's kin. In the old days, when the relationship was a more definite one, there was a peculiar and kindly intimacy between one's god-parents and one's self. The ties of a legally established relationship were there without any requirement of severity. They are fortunate who have in childhood visited a grandmother who was possessed of all her faculties, and her interest in life, and broadened sympathies that came with years, yet who gratefully resigned to the mother all responsibility for discipline or direction in upbringing.

That child is truly blessed who has known such a relative. She was a god-parent, if you will, caring to know your thoughts, to see your mind unfold, to enter with sympathy into your plans, to comprehend your hopes and fears.

I would not claim all of this for the gossip, but the word as I turn it over in my mind rouses pleasant fancies of some old crony, sitting in his doorway in an easy chair, his staff leaning idly against the step, passing the time of day with a stalwart god-son who has paused in the midst of the day's work to hail him as "good Gossip", and perhaps glean a bit of wisdom or kindly philosophy or intimate reminiscence, devoid of the sharpness of responsibility for instruction, or any pedagogic quality. Or I see a group of these kindred god-parents foregathering, somewhat ripened in their judgments and broadened in their outlook, turning over thoughts in their minds and exchanging them without the restraint of self-consciousness or any affectation other than that produced by the whim or mood of the moment.

Such is gossip; like many other words rep-

resenting any commodity that has been debased by misuse, it has taken on varied meanings. The sharp tongue of the shrew, — and there are shrews of any age and either sex, — has turned it often into an ill-natured thing. But it is a disparagement of ourselves if the word must always mean to us an ill-mannered or a harmful mode of conversation.

Gossip, I take it, however much we would purify the word, must have to do with human beings. I cannot gossip with you about Egyptian scarabs, or even about hens, or the weather. I cannot gossip with you about cabbages, though I can about kings. How *I* raise *my* cabbages, how I treat my hens, and how they affect me, is, on the other hand, a fruitful field for gossip. I have introduced the human element, and what I tell you of my demeanor in the cabbage patch, and what you reveal to me of your own hopes and fears when the hoe is in your hand, are a means of introducing one human being to another.

I remember as an early lesson of editorial days, when illustrations were to be sorted and

a page lay-out to be planned, that my wise chief would abruptly undo the work of a morning, throwing aside some beautiful picture of a scene in the Grand Canyon, let us say, and substitute for it some lesser achievement of the photographer's art, because perhaps on an overhanging rock the tiny figure of a human being was barely discernible. "Human interest!" he would say; "you must find human interest! That human figure in the picture interprets height and depth and grandeur. It shows the littleness of man, if you will, — his weakness and unimportance, if you choose to interpret it that way, — but the picture is for a human reader, and that little figure helps him to read."

Human interest is a primary essential to gossip, good or bad. The gossip of the small village which you so commonly deplore is, after all, an evidence that each villager is interested in what his neighbor is about. Eliminate that interest from your village, and what have you left of charity, or co-operation, or public spirit? It is a force working for all of the good that there is in the community.

The fact that it is most conspicuous when it is misapplied is not against it. The village sewing circle can discuss stitches, or the abstractions of religious thought for a brief time, but all voices will rise in one harmonious discord when the conversation turns to human beings. It is right that this should be so. The wrong lies only in the soured disposition of the shrew, misapplying so fine a stimulus to her own ill purposes.

It is a comfort to think that all that sort of gossip which has given Gossip a bad name is insincere. It disregards subjective as well as objective verities. It is a disease that yields very quickly to the antitoxin of sincerity. One voice raised in protest, and uttering truth in the midst of some plague of exaggeration that may have seized upon the company and spread like a galloping epidemic, will cause falsehood to shrivel up, however small the voice. This phenomenon only strengthens my assertion that gossip is essentially a worthy thing, and that its unworthy form is a sort of fungus growth which may poison some who come in contact with it,

but when crushed it leaves other vegetation to thrive as though its brief life had never been.

If I would gossip with you, then, about cabbages, it must be in relation to my cabbage patch or yours; and to lure you into that garden I must say at the start that it is my garden, cultivated in my way. Then, if I stimulate a little quarrel with you over methods or tastes, which I should greatly love to do, your quarrel is not with the cabbages, but with me. My gossip may contain all that I know about garden tools or fertilizers, or the best methods of boiling. It may be most erudite, if I am erudite, but it will never for a moment hold the interest of a fellow gossip unless human interest is there.

Furthermore, if you are to get real enjoyment from my gossip, you will want me sincere; that is, true to myself, even though I may not be true to cabbages. In fact, I think you will enjoy having me somewhat untrue to cabbages, provided I am not an expert, and provided that there is an understanding between us. I may tell you how I perfected

some scheme of cross-fertilization between my mint bed and my cabbage patch, in order to destroy those after-effects which are the greatest detriment to the social success of a worthy vegetable, so long as you and I both know that my gossip is taking on a certain exaggerating quality. It is when I pretend to be what I am not that our conversational barter becomes unsatisfactory to you. I am then offering you payment for your proffered thoughts in counterfeit coin.

Very often we have nothing but instinct as a test for the soundness of conversational currency, and instinct may of course go wrong. During the recent recrudescence of *vers libre* this fact has been widely demonstrated. A collection of verse appears which deals with the sordid side of community life — all that is evil is emphasized, and there seem not to be ten men in the town to prove it righteous. Healthy minded readers everywhere find themselves consciously or unconsciously putting these questions to the author: "Did you write the truth as you saw it? Did you try to interpret

life with sincerity? Or were you sacrificing your own knowledge of the truth in order to shock me into a neurotic sort of interest? Is there a clear understanding between us of your motive? If I know that you are sincere, I will take up your book again and seek to find in it what you want me to find."

The same question comes up in the minds of most normal people with regard to the work in certain schools of painting. The friendly observer gazes in puzzled wonder at a jumble of pigments splashed upon the canvas, and finds himself returning to the same fundamental question: "Is there honesty between the artist and me? Is he sincerely trying to convey something to me in a language that I cannot yet read? Or is he offering to play with me? If the first, I will be equally sincere in an effort to comprehend the truth he seeks to convey. If he is laughing, I will enjoy a laugh with him. But unless I am assured of this sincerity, I will turn to other gossips, and let my mind feed with theirs in some more familiar meadow."

To gossip together, you and I must be of one mood. I will withhold my serious thoughts if I find you laughing at them. I will withhold my laughing thoughts if I find you taking them seriously; I will withhold my fancies if you are being matter-of-fact; and I know that you will not give any of my gossip serious consideration unless you feel that I am sincere.

This establishment of a common mood between the gossip who writes and the gossip who reads is so essential that many an essay has utterly failed because its opening phrases establish a false relationship. The reader thought that he found between the lines of some apparently flippant introduction a request that the two should laugh together, and from that point on the writer lost his hold upon a fellow being who, instead of laughing with him sympathetically when occasion arose, was perhaps laughing at him for no occasion.

When I gossip with you by means of the written word I have this disadvantage, that my ideas gain no stimulation from any part that you might take in the conversation. For this

reason it is doubly important, I think, that the writer hold to a certain informality of style, an intimacy of phrase, as though he had not a public in mind whose collective faces yield no quick response of tone and glance, but an individual reader who is already intimate enough to share his moods and fancies.

And if he is writing to one, he must write as one. It is not fair for him to introduce strangers to the tête-à-tête. He may quote from this or that authority, if the quotation has become a part of his own apperception, but he must not drag some strange writer — some third person — bodily into the midst of his chat. He may not incorporate lengthy excerpts into his writing. Gossip is not a lecture; an essay is not a thesis.

Those essayists whom I love best have somehow mastered the art of writing to me direct, and writing, too, in such a way that I feel every now and then that here is my time for reply, — for an exchange of thoughts, either in agreement or controversy; and I lay their books aside with a sense both pleasant and

regretful, of shaking hands in good-by; looking after them as they move away as one watches a friend out of sight. For they have proved themselves kin of mine in the pleasantest sort of relationship, and with full satisfaction in the use of the phrase I acclaim each one as my good Gossip.

V

THE RIGHT NOT TO LAUGH

If one were to accuse you of poisoning your grandmother you would presumably smile in unruffled fashion and go about your affairs without feeling any burden of accusation. But if one accused you of lacking a sense of humor, you would first of all resent it indignantly; and furthermore, for an indefinite time to come you would be conscious of a desire to disprove the charge, scrutinizing anxiously every phrase that might conceal some subtle hidden test, emitting now and then forced laughs on suspicion. Perhaps you boast your emancipation in many fields where public opinion customarily rules. You wear a straw hat when you please; you object to the insignia of mourning; you flaunt your readiness to discuss any subject in mixed company; you

do or do not serve butter at your dinner-table; yet you are afraid you may not laugh in the right places. Many a one who proclaims his right to individuality of opinion fears to assert an equally inalienable right not to laugh. Deep in his heart he dreads the withering accusation that he lacks a sense of humor.

Here is a human trait the possession of which lightens burdens, cheers the down-hearted, recreates the weary, and in fact lubricates the whole machinery of living, and yet there is an idea abroad that the Creator has bestowed it upon only certain ones among His creatures. Such a belief is one with Predestination and the Damnation of Infants!

Providence probably needs no human defenders, and yet one should occasionally protest against making it a scape-goat for too many of our sins. The division of wealth, the continuance of drought, the birth-rate, the productivity of the soil, these and innumerable other things were always laid at the door of Providence in the past, but nowadays thinking

people are inclined to admit the power of human agency in the development of human ills. Nevertheless, we still charge it to Providence if a man appear to be handicapped by the lack of a humorous sense.

If it could be generally understood that humor is as universally a human birthright as, for instance, hair on top of the head, this sensitiveness as to its public recognition would largely disappear. It is true that through lack of care or misuse it may thin out and even totally disappear, yet if a shred of it remain there is hope of redeveloping and regaining it.

Belles-lettres provide a thousand definitions of humor and the sense of it, but let us agree, if you will, on this cumbersome description: a sense of humor is that trait which enables one to glean laughter from certain situations; the greater this sense, the wider will be the variety of situations which give us enjoyment. Painful or sad, solemn or silly, still we find a mirth-provoking side to them. We laugh, whether it be audible, side-shaking guffawry, or inward titillation with a solemn face to it,

or any degree between. If you accept this as a description of the trait, then you may set aside for the time being a mass of psychological speculation and treat the matter as a tangible thing in the physical world. What is this laughter, and what is its cause? Are we not all entitled to the use of it? If, as you say, your friend cannot be properly stimulated to laughter, should we assume an actual physical debility on his part, an atrophied function, let us say, or is it possible that your conclusions are based upon unfair tests?

There is a theory, among those who speculate upon racial psychology, that the reason one can sit for hours and gaze into the embers of a fire, with a brain filled with vague half-thoughts, is that fire is one of the few racial memories limned in every human brain. In the Stone Age and the Bronze Age we knew it, once even we worshiped it; and as a mystic link to-day it binds us to that dim racial childhood, though a world-old civilization rolls between. So does the spasm of laughter bind us to the childhood of the race. It is a world-old heritage

with the same mystic power to drag us back through lower strata of civilization even into savagery and beyond.

For it is a fact that laughter may be an unlovely thing, and if it control us we may be divested of refinements — nay, even be carried back to savagery. Why deny this? Even you, gentlest of women, know the experience of a laugh starting to your face, before your good breeding caught and stifled it, at some occasion which meant the discomfort or humiliation of a fellow-being.

Laughter is an *involuntary* physical reaction. Hughlings Jackson calls it "one of the innumerable epilepsies to which man is subject." It is apparently a universal heritage, though certain causes may operate more powerfully upon one individual than upon another to produce it. In the little child whose sensibilities are uncomplicated by any mental experience, unless they be racial ones, the shock of delicate touch — tickling, as we call it — first causes laughter. Why? The claim of our psychologist carries us a long leap backward to the most

elemental form of animal life. Beyond the savage stands the monkey, and dimly far beyond him the mollusk, whose only sense was that of touch. Picture this great-grandfather of living things lying motionless save for those nervous, fluttering, sensitive feelers extended to play the part of sight and hearing. A bit of seaweed bumps against them. A spasm racks the mollusk's whole being, crushing him into his shell until the surprise has abated; then the fact that no further attack follows brings relief. This is the germ of the cause of our laughter spasm — a sudden shock, instantly followed by a feeling of relief. Only such shocks as *were* followed by relief became racial memories.

Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement*, defines laughter as "an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing." Having thus explained its origin, he reasons further that no cause of laughter is in itself pleasurable, but that pleasure comes from the physical experience of laughter. He says:

The lungs expel the air at rapidly succeeding intervals and thus bring about a movement beneficial to health; which, alone, and not what precedes it in the mind, is the proper cause of gratification in a thought that represents nothing.

It is certain that all spontaneous laughter arises from the same physical cause, whether it be uncontrolled, or whether it be by habit so suppressed as to be merely a pleasurable sensation without a surface ripple. And it is equally certain that this involuntary physical reaction called laughter is a universal human birthright. All experiences that we call humorous prove on analysis to be but sensuous surprises combined with a sense of relief. The humor of Elia is brother to that of *Innocents Abroad*, cousin to Joe Miller's joke-book, cultured grandson to the buffoonery of court jesters and the practical joke of to-day; while by many intervening generations it is linked to the tickling that children love and dread, and by more generations still to the sudden frights and relief of infancy's game of peek-a-boo.

The sensibilities of to-day are more delicate than those of yesterday. The humor of early Europe was the sight of deformity and torture. The humor of another age was indecency. Laughter was cruel always, in some of its manifestations. The gods of high Olympus were filled with inextinguishable laughter at the lameness of one of their fellows.

But we have become, in this day and generation, epicures in titillatory sensation. The shock of seeing and hearing a slap-stick has given place in our regard to the most delicate of causations — the shock of mental surprise over unexpected thought-contrasts and similarities. We enjoy the laughter which arises from such causes more than that which reacts from cruder forms of shock. We roll our thoughts about upon a mental tongue, tasting and tasting till we are suddenly startled by an unexpected "similarity between utterly dissimilar things", or a "sudden contrast between things apparently similar."

Old Sailor Ben, in the *Story of a Bad Boy*, when he builds a house ashore cuts little port-

holes for windows and rears a bowsprit over the door. We picture this as we read, and our enjoyment is coextendent with the shock of surprise the ideas produce for us.

You laugh at simple occurrences in church that on the street would cause not the least enjoyment because of their ordinary environment. The appearance of a cat on the pulpit steps will amuse a whole congregation. For the same cause there is humor in a poem which relates commonplace things in a stately Miltonian verse. If the requisite surprise and relief occur, nothing can prevent the laugh reaction, though you may check it in its infancy. It is no respecter of proprieties or of sanctity, or of pity, or of love, though training may develop any of these considerations into a power of restraint.

What, then, ails this man who does not laugh sincerely when you laugh, who gains no enjoyment from situations that you find "humorous"?

First of all, are you sure that the situation rightfully has any surprise in it for him? The

old sailor seriously rigs out a bowsprit on his house, and you smile and say with some sense of superiority, "He doesn't know how funny he is; he has no sense of humor." But it causes no mental surprise to him to have a bowsprit on his home. His experience leads him to expect it. The cat on the pulpit steps does not amuse the sexton. He sees it there frequently when it follows him upon his daily rounds.

There is too much of the "holier than thou" attitude on the part of those who boast a sense of humor. They are prone to think that humor is an inherent quality in certain ideas, and they arbitrarily class all things which are funny to them as humorous, and all things which do not appeal to them as not humorous, and then proceed to measure the sense of humor of whole nations by their little yardstick. And others, on their part, tend to become cowardly, accepting the dictum of some little group of dilettantes as to what they shall laugh at, forgetting that nothing is funny which is not funny to them.

We laugh too many empty laughs. Consider,

for instance, the continued production of any one form of surprise — limericks, *enfant terrible* rhymes, or inverted aphorisms; after a time it is inevitable that their *denouements* shall lose the power to surprise us; we anticipate them, and a natural laugh is no more possible than it is after an anecdote the point of which we have heard or have foreseen. A new and ingenious bit of slang, which serves as a short cut to the expression of an idea, gives a pleasant mental shock. Effective slang is amusing. But the persistent repetition of it is a weariness to the flesh, and it is our right not to laugh! Obvious puns fail to cause laughter for the same simple reason. If obvious, they are not a form of humor.

Your introduction to your amusing anecdote, if it suggests the nature of the surprise in store, or even if it overshadows it by arousing too great an expectation, destroys the humorous quality of the climax. One funny story after another, all boasting the same quantity or quality of surprise, are jading to delicate sensibilities, and the final ones may rightfully

not be funny to one particular hearer, for he refuses to be surprised at any outcome.

Max Beerbohm claimed several years ago that an analysis of the funny stories in certain English comic papers proved that they and all their tribe are based upon sixteen subjects only, and he collates them as follows: mothers-in-law, henpecked husbands, twins, old maids, Jews, Frenchmen or Germans or Italians or negroes (not Russians or other foreigners of any denomination), fatness, thinness, long hair (worn by a man), baldness, seasickness, stuttering, bloomers, bad cheese, shooting the moon (slang for leaving a boarding-house without paying the bill), and red noses. If this analysis be true, it would prove merely that the professional writers of jokes turned for convenience's sake to those human situations that originally contained surprises for the majority, and because of their perennial recurrence are constantly being rediscovered by some portion of humankind. Yet you would probably admit your failure to enjoy a mother-in-law joke unless it reversed all previous conceptions of

what a mother-in-law joke should be, or unless the mere phrase revives an echo of old shocks. You might even react with surprise over the fact that your intelligent friend deemed it possible to amuse you thus. No point at all to a story is much funnier than an anticipated one!

Do you enjoy anecdotes of childhood? That enjoyment is co-extendant with your knowledge of the circumstances of childhood. Your friend who has forgotten his own boyhood, with no children near by in later life to revive such memories, has a whole field of humor closed to him.

Have you laughed at the appearance of a profane phrase or any other verbal impropriety in some incongruous environment, just as you smiled at the cat in church? The small boy who hears you laugh thinks that some advantageous form of humor must be inherent in the swear-word itself, and so makes it the whole point to some futile story.

Perhaps there are a few people who actually lack a sense of humor, but surely this is because circumstances or they themselves have grad-

ually deadened it. Single-mindedness will subdue it. The fanatic has no sense of humor. The man who rides violently upon a hobby endangers his. The reason is simple. His thought and imagination run in one deep path. They do not skip about from one path to another, gaining mental shocks from sudden parallels or contrasts. At first he loses ability to see the real humor in anything aimed at his chosen hobby. If his zeal increases, his thoughts never wander through other fields of experience and none of these mental shocks is possible for him.

It is so easy to allow your own enjoyment of the surprise in a certain situation to blind you to the differing sensibilities of others. That anecdote of the intoxicated man in the midst of a street crowd repeatedly gives me enjoyment. An irresponsible drunken man is so often the very personification of pure nonsense. His mental processes are forever producing the unexpected.

Yet my friend whose life is spent in the slums where evidences of vice are not phenomena,

and drunken incoherence is a sordid commonplace, finds no surprises in such a story, — no shock of climax that produces laughter. I can not justly disparage on this ground the quality of her sense of humor. In return I ask that she shall not accuse me of extolling or condoning drunkenness by telling of it. It was not the man's drunkenness at which I laughed, but at his nonsense.

After all, it is better not to laugh aloud than to have your laughter misunderstood. Humor without sympathetic understanding is a possession with a dangerous kick to it. Humor without kindliness can be a wicked thing. In your writing remember that the printed symbols convey neither friendly glance nor tone of voice to belie the unfriendlier side of some surprising, double-sensed way of phrasing an idea.

Broad human sympathy is absolutely essential to a complete sense of humor — a comprehension of and interest in other men's beliefs as well as your own. The egotist gradually loses his sense of humor. One thought dominates all others in his mind. He is seldom

surprised by sudden similarities or contrasts of experience. His attitude of mind leads him to believe that no other idea presumes to be comparable to the idea he now entertains.

On the other hand, a multitude of equally trodden brain-paths make for a sense of humor; therefore it is invariably possessed by the jack-of-all-trades, who does so many things pretty well that he succeeds in nothing. Such men laugh easily. They adopt readily any view-point, being wedded to none, and these changing points of view admit constantly of new thought-surprises. They are certain to possess a strong sense of humor, and just as invariably have they a ready sympathy for their fellow-men.

But they hold no monopoly. The man of one idea and the egotist may regain this power of laughter just so far as they can widen their sympathies and learn, in their hours of recreation, to see life through other men's eyes. Books will help them, unless they begin too late or hold to the single course in their reading. Love is bound to help them! Many a man has regained his sense of humor through love for

one, just as a starter, and through her a love for all humanity. Thackeray declares sense of humor and human sympathy synonymous. At least they are coextendent. For the humorous literature we love best, whether it be Dickens or Thackeray, Stockton or Clemens, depends upon the recurrent shocks of surprise that come to us when we recognize a common humanity displaying itself in unexpected places.

But in every case a man's sense of humor is his own, coextendent with his own private mental experiences. Therefore, do not force a laugh. Have the courage of this conviction — that what is not funny to you is not funny. And be slow to bring the charge against your neighbor that he lacks this God-given sense. See first whether you are not trying to measure his stock-in-trade by your own individual standard. If your conscience be clear in this regard, then search him for the germ which he alone is crushing down somewhere in the recesses of his soul. Tell him to cultivate his heart, and learn to love his neighbor as himself, and life will be full of the surprises that make for laughter.

VI

THE EVERY-DAY PROFANITY OF OUR BEST PEOPLE

SWEARING is not generally a matter of morals. It is a question of good taste, if you like, or propriety and good form, and usually it is a question of education. Taking the name of Deity "in vain" violates one of the commandments; but vain use of a word or phrase that is utterly meaningless to its user does not come within this description. Seldom, in fact, does one who utters an oath have the real meaning of the phrase in his thought.

"Ah," says Mrs. Rollo Merton, "but you have hit upon the very meaning of 'in vain.' It is the careless or ignorant use of such terms that constitutes profanity." If she is right, then we must grant that the commandment has been broken by "Zounds!" which is a corrup-

tion of "God's wounds"; "Ods-bodikins!" which originally was "God's body"; "Dear me!" which is really "Dio mio"; and "Oh my!" "Goodness gracious!" "Mercy!" "Gee!" and all the other long-established evasions and abbreviations which never indicate in these days that the speaker has their origin in mind. No; let us assume that this every-day profanity of good people indicates not a laxity of morals, not even low ethical standards, but a totally different and much more superficial ailment, which may be called a disease of the vocabulary.

The Encyclopædia Britannica, which makes no real distinction between "oaths" and "swearing" and "profanity", says epigrammatically, if one may accuse the *Britannica* of epigrams, that oaths are "promises made under non-human penalty or sanction." As a definition for an oath in a legal sense this might be adequate, but it covers less than a third of the field. Every-day profanity, as it is commonly understood, naturally falls into three great divisions: the asseverative, as for instance "So help me!"; the denunciatory, as

"Devil take him!"; and the interjectional, "Zounds!" All of these groups have representation in the casual swear-words of our best people.

Let us consider, in low tones if you like, asseverative profanity. The very spelling of the word *answer* indicates the commonplaceness of an assertion supported by an oath: *an-swer*, to swear in opposition to; to take oath in support of your own statement. Did you go to church last Sunday? If you were an English cockney, you might answer, "I did, s'help me!" If you were an Irishman, you would say, "I did, begorra!" You yourself may say, "I did, indeed." If, to quote the *Britannica*, you call upon non-human witnesses in support of your statement, is there not a hint of confession that your word needs sustaining, and that perhaps human witnesses might fail you? Consider the evident consciousness of one's own integrity that lies in the simple phrase "I did."

"It comes to pass oft," says Sir Toby Belch, "that a terrible oath, with a swaggering accent

sharply twanged off, gives manhood more approbation than very proof itself would have earned it."

Of denunciatory expletives one must speak even more softly. "A pox upon you!" said Swift, in the days when smallpox was universal. "Burn him!" said men of that and later generations, invoking hell fire upon an enemy. Great and worthy oaths there have been in this group, many that have won a place for themselves in history. Washington facing the traitor Lee, Farragut facing the torpedoes, voiced wrath or contempt in words so well-timed and obviously so sincere that they are enshrined (in a somewhat dilute form, we suspect,) even in our school-books. And yet it is this group that has, if one may so express it, the lowest social position. Denunciation requires an object; it implies an animate one, and therefore means swearing *at* somebody or something. If at somebody, it involves rudeness and "bad form"; at something, it involves also futility, absurdity, or a confession of inadequacy. The every-day oaths of this class are often only

cheap substitutes for deeds; it is easier to drat a situation than to face it out.

It is the third group, the interjectional oaths, that largely provides profanity for our best people. This division covers a field of expression so broad and so vaguely defined that a hasty definition might be viewed as offensive personal criticism by the gentlest reader. "Jove!" "Gee whiz!" "Jiminy crickets!" "Oh my!" "Oh dear!" "Gosh!" "I'll be dinged!" "Shiver my timbers!" "Gracious!" "Goodness!" "Peste!" "Carramba!" "Donner und Blitzen!" — all were once asseverative or denunciatory, but time has rubbed away their keen points and biting edges, just as waves and sand in time render harmless a bit of glass on the sea-shore. "Thunder and lightning!" says the German, and some remote and devout ancestor shivers in the grave at this carelessly profane reference to the weapons of almighty Thor.

Most of our own commonplace exclamations might be traced back to an earlier day when the vigor of their youth was still within them.

Imagine two old Romans standing upon the deck of a ship gazing upon the eruption of Vesuvius. They watch in awe-struck silence, until one of them gasps, "I swear by Father Jove that never before have I beheld such wonders!" And the other echoes, "Oh Gemini, Heavenly Twins, gaze down into my heart, for I have no words to paint the glory of this spectacle!" Centuries later the inheritors of some of their classic speech gaze upon Vesuvius, and one says, "Jove! what a sight!" and the other echoes, "Jiminy! ain't it grand!"

Gone are the echoing oaths of a day when swearing was an art. Those swash-buckling phrases went with swash-buckling deeds. "By the bones of Saint Michael! I will spit thee to thy cringing gizzard!" There was a mouth-filling and classic threat for you! In these days, when automatic revolvers have replaced fencing-swords, there isn't time to say it. Gone are the cloud-splitting denunciations of militant churchmen, and if we fling out what is left of the sounding phrases of some theological curse, it is as a boy might take from his pocket a

stingless hornet for the effect that it produces in the schoolroom, until in time both hornet and effect become worn out.

Gone are all these mighty invocations; but why are they gone? Their parts may all be found in the dictionary. Might not you and I put them together again? Only as we might reconstruct the mammoth; he will stand here bravely in his cold bones, but he will not trumpet for us.

It was a pathetic end to which those old oaths came. They were done to death, and their descendants inherit a weakened frame and vitiated blood, and can never do the sturdy work their fathers did.

Working our strong words to death, or at least working them into decrepitude, is a crime not confined to any age. Our forefathers accomplished it in their time. "Zounds!" and "Ods-bodikins!" we have already referred to. "Aye, Marry", is another. "Yes, by Mary!" was its meaning in its vigorous youth; then it declined into merely a mild form of emphasis, and then, like "Zounds" and "Gra-

mercy", — God's mercy, — died altogether. More humiliating still was the fall of that stately oath "By our Lady!" for instead of death when death was welcome, it survives as a British vulgarism that for some whimsical reason is considered unworthy a place in reputable society's vocabulary.

Current speech of to-day in most walks of society does not include many mouth-filling oaths to take the place of the old. It is a politer age or one certainly of softer expression. But we are still doing words and phrases to death, and the sin is of course committed against those that must do the heavy work. They are broken down, while those that must do the delicate work have their edges dulled and their points blunted. "God's mercy!" became finally one meaningless word and ceased to profane the name of Deity; "Perfec'ly elegant" becomes at times a single word, and it profanes our beloved mother tongue. It and its like constitute the commonest profanity of school-girls of our day. What have we left of "Splendid!" "Mighty!" "Gorgeous!"

"Awful!" "Horrible!" "Indeed!" and many more?

Observe the display types of a yellow newspaper. Those are the oaths of journalism. Can you recall their gradual growth until they reached the heyday of their vigor? Once important news appeared in letters an inch high, then they were two inches, then three inches, then they overran the page. If I speak to you always at the top of my voice, what shall I do when I feel the need of shouting? Display type that is so large one cannot read it at a glance has surely lost its virtue. Nothing is left for the editor but red ink. Soon, too, he finds that he is printing the entire outside page in red, and that too has lost its value.

There is a recourse that has not occurred to the editor of the yellow journal. He might revert to the smallest type in the shop for his scare-heads, centering them in a white space at the top of the sheet, and you and I, seeing such a display on the news-stands, would cry out "Heavens!" or "Jiminy Christmas!" or whatever was our custom, "look at the 'New

York Screech'! See that unusual type! Something enormous must have happened."

Did you go to church last Sunday? "I did, begorra!" "I did, s' help me!" "I did." The unusualness of a simple assertion nowadays gives it a force greater than can be gained by all the expletives in the dictionary.

I would save our strong words, oaths or not, if I could. Some may have become worn out; some are soiled and thrown in the gutter. Some, in equally hard straits, have not a wide enough circle of acquaintance to be readily used or readily understood. What a humiliating spectacle is the word *damn!* Once a powerful invective, conveying all the righteous anger of the church, now a miserable subterfuge of the playwright if he needs a laugh in the midst of a tense situation; now a commonplace that a French translator of English idiom found he could render only by the word *très*.

Educators who have investigated the matter tell us that the average speaking vocabulary of a grammar-school graduate contains fewer than one thousand words. This does not mean

that all of the nouns with which he is acquainted through his history or geography do not bring the number up to a greater total, but that the words which he actually uses in conversation range from five hundred to one thousand. With vocabularies such as these no wonder that young men in their days of enthusiasm and desire for emphasis grope vainly throughout their own equipment for forcible expressions, and then gather soiled discards from the gutter. No wonder "Perfectly lovely" and "Just elegant" are worked to the extent that they are, and are spread so thin over so broad a field that in time they mean nothing at all.

Poor oaths! Once denunciations and appeals to Heaven, some of them have reached the lowest depth, and are substitutes for conversation, taking rank with "Well, well!" "Do tell!" "I want to know!" and the like. And what greater profanation of our tongue is there than these? "Well, well!" was once one of the amenities of speech, a courtesy of conversation. "What you have said is well; now hear my view," was what it implied. But now

it is a stop-gap, one of several such substitutes for thought; as though in our conversational barter you offer me your idea and I return payment with a draft on a bank where I have no account, half hoping that before you discover the deception the cash will come to me.

The conclusion of the matter is this: I do not argue for the destruction, but for the conservation of profanity of all kinds, both old and new. I would say to a young man, "My son, you may have two *damns* for conversational use between now and Easter," and if I had control over his vocabulary, I feel confident of this result: that as each emotional crisis appeared, and he started to squander one of his treasures, he would pause and say to himself, "No, there may be a greater crisis tomorrow," and he would search through his vocabulary for some effective adjective or adverb that would serve the moment's purpose. It is probable that when Easter came the two words would still be at his disposal. With a free conscience I could then say to him: "Go forth, young man, and spend them; spend them

riotously. You have earned the right, and, after all, the better the day the better the deed."

To you, gentle reader, I would not presume to apply such a restriction. I would set a task far more difficult. First I would deprive you in your written communications of those mildest of all your expletives, underlined words and double exclamation points!! And then I would impose a greater restraint. There is a word that once possessed a vigor and a power that is altogether lost: "Verily, verily" — "In truth, in truth." Now it is *very*, and though it still means *in truth*, it has become so weakened by usage that it conveys no force whatever. You meet me on the street and say, "It is a very fine day." What do you mean? Probably you mean, "How do you do?" What you have said is simply a salutation. But if you should say to me, "It is a fine day," you probably mean that it is a *fine day*. That little word *very* has been so weakened, so frayed at the edges, that it harms rather than helps its companions. So, gentle reader, I would say to you, if I had arbitrary

power over your speech or your written correspondence, "This week I will allow you only two *verys*"; and though for a time such restraint may make you self-conscious, yet it will force you to grope about for musty treasures in the storehouse of your memory, and furbish up old adjectives and adverbs, even drive you now and again to a careful appraisal of your best slang; and when this temporary self-consciousness shall pass, not only your vigor of speech, but your exactitude and clarity of thought will be the better for it.

"Thought itself is words — inner speech;" if this indeed be true then I am urging the conservation of the very stuff that mind is made of, and bespeaking for your spirit wider range with each unit of strength or subtlety that is added to your working vocabulary.

VII

ETHICS OF THE PEN

To write as naturally and unaffectedly as you would chat with a friend, that is an accomplishment worth acquiring. There are many who having acquired this fluency, discover the pen to be the liberator of the spirit, and gain a greater power of expression through it than their tongue might ever have mastered.

Yet in seeking this freedom of the pen, you must be aware of certain peculiar limits to its liberty, not due primarily to any restraint of your own, but imposed upon it from without.

Society has bridled my tongue. It is not free to utter what it will, however uncontrolled may be the mind and disposition behind it. Man-made laws control it. It must not lie about my neighbor to his injury, nor bear any false witness against him. It may not scatter noisome phrases or ideas; and society asks

that it shall not become a trouble maker through mere malice, or habitually decry others, or unduly vaunt myself or my deeds.

It may not steal; yet I fear this commandment rules the tongue in feeble fashion, leaving judgment to a public opinion which does not yet determine distinctions between my tongue's grand larceny, its petty thievery and its mere umbrella borrowing.

The control that society exercises over my tongue is unquestioned, yet with it I may break all social rules, even all moral laws with a certain impunity, for the very simple reason that the record of its misdeeds is graven on the imperfect and perishable tablets of a hearer's memory. It is not so with my pen. All of these restrictions control it with doubled force. What is written is written. My pen is its own incontrovertible and coldly relentless accuser.

The misdeeds of my tongue may be extenuated by the expression on my face or the tone of my voice. My pen has no such defenders, and each petty misdeed is magnified by very

reason of their absence. The stinging phrase, sheathed in a smile or a friendly tone, may be flourished harmlessly and theatrically with fine effect; and then its wielder, seeking similar effects with his pen and carelessly forgetting that it lacks such a scabbard, finds to his surprise that he has cut and jabbed and now faces a pack of righteously angry enemies.

This is no legal treatise for the guidance of budding malefactors, so I need not pretend to define with exactitude any of those restraints which common and statute law exercise over my pen. Thank Heaven for that! Learned judges have floundered in a morass of such definition, and the libeler and the pirate and the plagiarist, the perverter and the poisoner find many acres of territory in No Man's Land where their outlawry goes unpunished.

It is not of the legal but of the ethical behavior of our pens that I would chat with you. Not only the morals but the manners of your writing I would have you consider. Yet not the morals and manners of any piece of writing in itself, for I question whether any art can be

discussed in terms of right and wrong, but in its relation to others and to yourself.

In seeking for some recognised code of behavior among the gentlefolk of the pen, I find myself turning first to journalism, that field where writing is a commodity that is daily bought and sold. If here we should find a recognised code of ethics, perhaps we might utilize it as a framework in formulating a code for the individual.

The ethics of newspaperdom! Surely there is such a code, whether or not any single sheet daily abides by it; and I believe that when one has compressed all of its commandments into a few comprehensive ones, you would recognise rules that govern the conduct of decent folk in any walk of life.

First of all, *the respectable newspaper as a purveyor of certain literary commodities recognises that it should not sell its goods under false labels.* Facts should not be adulterated by opinion, advertising should not appear as unprejudiced news, editorials should not be for sale to the highest bidder. No competent

newspaper man will deny this first principle of my code. His journal may sin occasionally, as undoubtedly it does, but he will recognise the sin when it is called to his attention. The violently partisan paper which inaccurately presents the political speeches of the other side; the yellow paper which builds a cabled rumor into a headlined assertion of fact, though knowing it is only a rumor; the paper whose news columns are controlled by its advertising department and, therefore, fails to publish the important fact of a serious accident in some prominent department store; the secretly owned paper which carries on an editorial propaganda that it dares not avow clearly and openly; these all break this first commandment. If they do it wantonly and persistently they deserve the epithet "disreputable."

Secondly, *that commodity which the newspaper offers for sale should be gotten honestly.* Theft, bribery, breach of confidence, — none of these may escape condemnation under any such alias as "newspaper hustle," "up-to-date

journalism," or the like. No reputable newspaper man will dispute with me as to this section of my code, except perhaps that he may insist upon its standing first. The editor who allows his reporter to steal private letters from an office waste basket, or knowing that they are so stolen publishes them; the editor who permits a reporter to secure documents by bribery; or one who publishes statements given to him or his reporters in confidence; such men are the pariahs of journalism, lepers who walk abroad constantly tinkling their own little bells of warning.

Please do not think of me as dreaming, in my remote and comfortable chair, of some fanciful Park Row establishment where St. Peter has become city editor and Gabriel goes abroad crying his papers. The graduate of a very earthly and sinful Park Row tells us of how he went forth as a reporter to get an advance statement of the Hughes Insurance Committee which was to be given out the following day. The Committee had adjourned, but a friendly attaché let fall the hint that a

stack of the coveted reports lay ready printed in the locked committee room. Five dollars to a scrubwoman ought to get you one, he added. The reporter carried the suggestion to his chief. "The man who turned that trick would get fired," said the city editor. Listen again to the graduate of a Philadelphia paper. "A wedding was soon to occur in a fashionable residence and I was sent to interview, if possible, any member of the reticent household. I rang the bell, and to my surprise the door was instantly opened and someone reproached me for my delay and hurried me upstairs to a bedroom, where I found a dissheveled and impatient young woman. She was the bride-to-be, and they took me for the hairdresser!" It was a great chance — but he told the truth and went away. It is pleasant to know that such quixotic behavior was in accord with the standards of the office that sent him. "I make a distinction," said an ex-city editor in further analysis of the principle, "between newsgetting in the service of the public weal and in the pursuit of a 'private' story. I

would conceal myself under a sofa to get proof of crime, because my paper has certain recognised police functions. Hard to draw the dividing line? No harder than for you personally to decide where your duty lies if you learn, for instance, of a possible enemy conspiracy hatching close at hand and you must act at once, though spying is utterly at variance with your personal code."

"There is enough news that can be gotten honestly. Let the rest go." It is safe to assert that a majority of real newspapers would be content to have this blazoned in their city rooms. As for the others — they only prove the rule.

These two commandments, then, sum up certain fundamental requirements of clean journalism. Your own pen, free from the jurisdiction of any office, nevertheless finds much of this same code imposed upon it by accepted social standards and your own ethical sense. For, firstly, it may not exploit its writings under false labels. It may not, for instance, write salaciously under pretence

of sermonizing, when it is actually impelled by a desire to win the attention of the prurient. No balder illustrations of this may be found than in the field of moving picture scenarios, where alleged preachments on the white slave traffic or birth control or kindred topics have even deluded simple-hearted clergymen into endorsements of their mercenary campaigns for publicity. We have seen yellow-minded poets undertake a similar traffic in mislabelled literary wares; and the market has known for many years those fugitive magazines which serve as a vehicle for one or two writers who pretend to address "the few" advanced and emancipated thinkers, but in reality seek the many who are retarded in moral development. Another common example of false labelling is furnished by the writer who sells his pen, whether it be to a breakfast food or a foreign government, and then denies, by every method of implication, that his product is hired propaganda. A publisher tells us, for instance, of an eminent editorial writer who came to him with the offer to exploit a book

by means of many favorable references, if given a share in the royalties.

Varieties of evident mislabelling are unfortunately too numerous for cataloging, but it seems to me that we might mention the play which exploits race prejudice and alleges a humanitarian motive; and in fact any other capitalization of certain intense emotions under the pretence of seeking some reader's welfare, or the general "uplift." Or, in quite a different field, we might include the signed "write-up" which has been published with certain qualifying sentences omitted, unless the result be labelled "adv." in one way or another. There is no law against any of these things, — just as there was for years no law against bottling bad whisky and labelling it "nerve tonic." But the public conscience has an increasingly clear sense of their impropriety. The more a man writes and the greater the degree of confidence he has gained, the more firmly established becomes the right of his readers to demand honest dealing. If, for instance, he gains some reputation for

shrewd or sound criticism, he has the less moral right to sell out his critical judgments to any bidder.

I think it amounts to this: your reader is entitled to know your motive in writing. You may write to amuse, to entertain, to preach, to teach, or to combine them all; and you may now and then let him guess your motive. But you may not deceive him by *asserting* one motive while you secretly harbor another. With all of my enjoyment of Mr. G. B. Shaw's wit my pleasure is lessened by the unprovable but instinctive suspicion that he falsely labels many of his wares.

The bottler of bad whisky who deals in false labels may be convicted only after an analysis of his product; but a keen-sensed critic may be convinced of the crime to his own satisfaction after merely a smell and a taste. The sole test of certain literary mislabellings is the honesty of the writer's purpose; and unfortunately his mind cannot be analyzed. Yet there is a certain tang in the smell or the taste — perhaps you note it in the hell-fire that the

sensational preacher uses as an aid toward conversions, or in the alleged modernity of form which some poet uses to cloak an ignorance of his art, — and you distrust at once the labels on their goods.

Secondly, what my pen has to offer it must secure honestly. Greatly have I dreaded the approach of this assertion. It has shimmered before me as I wrote, like a distant sea of unknown depth; and now I am upon its brink, brought here by some faint hope that I might wade across. Breach of confidence, trickery, theft — committed in the struggle to get good copy — these were the sins that violated our journalistic code, and they have their parallels in the behavior of individual writers. Using your friends and acquaintances as "copy" in ways that will make them recognisable and expose some bit of confidential life history or some frailty for the public entertainment, — that, like the sale of parental love-letters, is breach of confidence fully as heinous as the crime of a reporter who prints interviews gained under promise of silence. Yet friends and acquaint-

ances may be the best copy in the world for your romancer; to build a wall for him between the legitimate and the illegitimate use of this material is more than I know how to do, beyond saying that he must protect them in their right to anonymity. His own good taste must erect that barrier, and let him build it stout and high, for he will find himself tempted often enough to climb over it, or at least to balance upon its summit.

After breach of confidence, theft in its various degrees. A short and ugly word! Plagiarism has a better sound, particularly since we are discussing something other than actual crime in these pages. What is plagiarism? How far may a writer go in the use of material formulated by another? My learned Doctor tells me that the crime exists in three degrees: that plagiarism in the first degree merits hanging, whereas plagiarism in the second degree may be expiated by some milder punishment, and that the third degree is no crime at all, but parody, which is a pleasant sport and good for the literary health.

It is not worth while to cite even a small proportion of those eminent writers who have admittedly found their raw material in pages produced by another and then served it up with some sauce of their own making. Arguments on this subject have raged since there ever was a body of written literature, and whatever the ruling might have been in any particular age or decade, always there would arise a genius of that day who took what he wanted wherever he found it and by the miracle of his skill gave it rebirth; and that public which is the final arbiter, after giving some hearing to the case, would render its decision in favor of Genius.

"An' what 'e thought 'e might require
'E went an' took — the same as me."

"A great poet may really borrow," says Landor; "he may condescend to an obligation at the hand of an equal or an inferior; but he forfeits his title if he borrows more than the amount of his own possessions . . . the lowlier of intellect may lay out a table in their field, at which table the highest one shall some-

times be disposed to partake; want does not compel him."

"The man of genius," says Dumas, "does not steal, he conquers, and what he conquers he annexes to his empire. He makes laws for it, he peoples it with his subjects, and extends his golden sceptre over it. And where is the man who, on surveying his beautiful kingdom, shall dare to assert that this or that part of his land is no part of his property?"

"But suppose a clamor is raised, what of it?" says Erasmus; "those are wiser who publish under their name the works of another . . . . thinking that if accused of plagiarism they will in the meantime have profited by it."

If Landor and Dumas and others of their opinion be right, is there anything left of the sin of plagiarism? Not if you are superior in genius to the man you rob! And as you yourself must decide this matter it is apparent that you may steal with the greater freedom as you gain the greater self-esteem.

It is pleasant to gather ideas in the garden of nonsense, but dull duty requires me to seek

some pathway of reason leading out. "Plagiarius" says the Latin dictionary, "a man-stealer or kidnapper: one who gives himself out to be the author of another man's book." Clearly, the matter which is stolen must be the property of another. Yet no writer has a private right to any particular situation. Otherwise the public storehouse would now be empty. Gozzi, the Italian playwright, asserted the existence of only thirty-six possible tragic situations, and Schiller, who at first disputed this, later admitted he was unable to find so many.

"No man has a monopoly of the Lost Will, of the Missing Heir, or of the Infants Changed at Nurse," says a writer in the *Atlantic*. "Whoso will may get what effect he can out of these well-worn properties of the story teller." He then quotes these three rules formulated by an English reviewer; first, we would permit any great modern artist to recut and to set anew the literary gems of classic times and of the middle ages; second, all authors have equal right to the stock situations which are

the common store of humanity; third, an author has a right to borrow or buy an idea if he frankly acknowledges the transaction.

Paralleling another's situation may not prove plagiarism, but what of borrowing his style also? Peculiarity of style may be a man's own, yet if imitation of it be theft, all amateur writers and most of their betters are kleptomaniacs. "No actress," says E. F. Benson, "can help wriggling after seeing the Divine Sarah, no actor can help ranting after seeing — somebody else."

But I will not allow this path to lead me toward any cumbersomely exact assertion, as that plagiarism is committed when one repeats some particular combination of situations, or handles them in a certain fashion. How do I know? The charge of plagiarism is so easily and so readily brought by any writer who thinks himself aggrieved. And yet it is so difficult to prove because the intent must be there. A thief must have the intent to steal. A plagiarist must "give himself out to be the author of another man's book." In

the many interesting discussions of this subject that I have read, there is always the assumption that the degree of the crime lies in the amount of the injury that one writer, wittingly or unwittingly, has done another. To my mind the sin of plagiarism lies chiefly in the writer's betrayal of his reader's confidence. It is just another question of false labelling. M. Sardou defended himself against a charge of theft by explaining that he had privately purchased the rights to the original from its author. Yet as one critic rightly protests, "but for the exposure M. Sardou would have received credit for a humorous invention not his."

If there be any crime against an original owner, that is a legal matter for the courts, if necessary. But if the writer would keep his pen clean he will not do so by considering merely how he may avoid legal entanglement. The greater wrong lies in the deceit of an indefinite number of readers. M. Sardou and Charles Reade, to name two notable offenders, avoided illegality and committed a greater

wrong. Genius partaking without acknowledgment from a table spread by the lowly typifies a code that we trust may have even fewer defenders as civilization advances.

If this attitude of mine leaves no room for so-called "unconscious plagiarism" it is because I believe there is no such thing. There is no unconscious thievery. The interesting coincidences which sometimes do occur, and those which are so often discovered by meticulous "penny-a-liners" do not long mislead the fairminded. There is an atmosphere about real literary theft that is unmistakable when all the arguments are heard. The writer who keeps faith with his reader, giving full credit whenever failure to do so might by any possibility mislead, being frank whenever he distrusts the spontaneity of his own invention, may go ahead with the assurance that honest critics will find little difficulty in distinguishing between crime and coincidence.

Honest labels on wares honestly secured! A compact code, to be sure, but a good deal of kernel hides in that small shell. The only

other restraints that good morals and good manners impose upon your pen are those that common courtesy or human sympathy compel you to exercise in any of your dealings with your fellows, intensified by that great distinction which lies between the freedom of the tongue and the freedom of the pen. "While I did perhaps more than any other man to drive So-and-so out of public life," said a certain journalist, — and he spoke truly, — "it is a source of pleasure to me, and of real pride as I look back over it all, that I was never unfair to him personally. I liked the man, and I tried, all the while that I was exposing his inefficiency for his public office, to acquaint my readers with his oddly likable traits. As a matter of fact, I think that through it all he rather liked me." The courtesy of the pen is so easily forgotten in the heat of any controversy, or its lack of a sheath to cover its cutting edge is so readily overlooked! Let me but use vigorous English as a means for attaining an end, and behold I seem to be making a sharp personal attack. Prove to

me that you are able to write humorously of a man without thereby implying your own superiority to him, and I will grant you at once a place among literary gentlefolk.

The limitations upon our pens are many, but after all most of them would never occur to us as restraints if our instincts were sound. I imagine that the writer who thinks of each written word as a means of communication between himself and some good-fellow of a reader, — someone he would like to know, between whom and himself he would like to establish a good understanding, — I imagine such a writer has little difficulty in making his pen behave.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

PSD 2343 9/77

University Of California, Los Angeles
L 007 618 615 4

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
AA 000 352 209 1